



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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He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. — Proverbs 28:13

Heavenly wisdom! It is revealed to fools to make them wise about God, themselves, and their sins.

The question is not whether we are sinners. You and I are sinners. All men are sinners before God. You and I sin in all that we do. We pollute even the good works that God gives us to do and mar them in all sorts of ways because the natures by which we perform those deeds are corrupt. The bodies of death in which we live and by which we must perform all our deeds, even as regenerated children of God, are like large, heavy weights. When as little birds we try to fly and flutter in the good works that God gives us to do, we are weighed down with our sinful natures. So our flights are crooked, and we tumble and fall.

Man, who is a sinner and who sins in all that he does, always does something with his sins. The natural man always covers his sins. That is the folly of the natural man exposed by the wisdom of God. Over against covering one's sins stands the wisdom of God: confess your sins and forsake them.

Man's name in the text is *sinner*. That is the wisdom of God as well. No one can hear any other part of the wisdom of God in this proverb who will not hear this wisdom about himself. Man is a sinner. A mighty stream of foul transgressions prevails from day to day! He commits transgressions because his nature is totally depraved and corrupt. God made man good. Man corrupted himself by his sin. And under the just judgment of God, man was punished with death. He is conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins. And out of that corrupt and dead nature, as a stream from its fountain, flows a torrent of sins.

This is true whether one is regenerated or not. The wisdom of God condemns man, and the whole human race, not only in his actions but also in his nature. Man is a sinner in his nature. And because he is a sinner, he does according to that nature. He sins. So every man has a multitude, an uncountable multitude, of sins. My sins are more than I can count, more than the hairs of my head!

How do you treat your sins?

Man's folly! He who covers his sins!

Covering his sins is what man has been doing since the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve ran from the presence of God and made themselves aprons of fig leaves to cover their nakedness. Adam, as he stood there before God with his fig leaves, wickedly blamed his wife for his

sins. When God called Eve to account for her sins, she did not confess them either but pointed to the snake as the culprit. The snake with the devil inside him had the shrewdness to say nothing at all to God. By this he covered his sins too, and he slithered off to continue his war of rebellion against God. So man has been covering his sins ever since Eden.

You know that the Bible speaks in a good sense of covering sins!

"Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins" (Prov. 10:12).

"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (Prov. 17:9).

"Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

"Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

Is that not lovely?

That covering of sins is the fruit of love, love which is the gift of God to his people.

False love covers sins by overlooking sins, minimizing sins, or soothing itself with the pious platitude "We are sinners; so he has his sins, I have mine, and we should not be judgmental." This is not love but hatred. It is one of the foolish attempts of man to cover sins, which is exposed by the wisdom of God.

Love covers sins because love does not go about spreading the sin of the poor brother to everyone who will listen. Love covers sins because if the brother sins against someone in private, love will go to that person in private in order to gain him. Love covers the multitude of transgressions because if you sin against a brother, in love you will seek him out and confess your sin to him. Love covers the multitude of sins because in love we easily forgive one another the trespasses that we multiply against one another on a daily basis. Love covers a multitude of sins because if the brother sins, love does not let him go on in that sin unrebuked and unaddressed. Love seeks his repentance and thus his salvation. Love will do that at great expense to itself, over many obstacles, and patiently. Love brings to the brother the love of God in Christ Jesus at the cross, where sin was covered, and love comforts the brother with Christ's blood and so covers sin.

Against that covering there is no law. Divine wisdom!

But to cover sins! Man's folly!

He covers those sins before man, if he can. But more importantly, he covers those sins before God. The man who covers his sins hardens his heart against God. Like Pharaoh, that man says in his heart, "Who is Jehovah?" Secure in his sins, he vaunts himself against God and proudly maintains himself in his heart over against Jehovah God. Taking that stance against God in his heart, man covers his sins before God.

There is a brazen and bold covering of sins. We see today as part of the development of wickedness that man is worse than Adam and Eve, who at least made aprons of fig leaves and ran away from God. Man, developed in his wickedness, is as brazen as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were in their sins. "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom, they hide it not. Woe unto their soul! for they have rewarded evil unto themselves" (Isa. 3:9). So when man is really wicked and truly hardened in his sins, then as Sodom he shouts his sins from the rooftops and displays them openly for all to see and to speak of how good they are. He is like the brazen-foreheaded whore of Proverbs, who, after she had made her bed and defiled it with another man, got up to eat as though nothing had happened, and she wiped her mouth and said, "I have done no wickedness" (Prov. 30:20). So we see that what man formerly hid in his closet and behind euphemisms, he now flaunts before the world, and he declares before the God of judgment and before all men that he has no sins! Divorce and remarriage, sodomy, lesbianism, bestiality, and whatever else can come from the dark mind of man he makes an acceptable and a normal part of society. By that brazenness he declares loudly and stubbornly that he has no sins. That is a special kind of covering of sins that is far advanced down the way of God's judgment against sin, in which a man declares his shame before all and says that what God declares to be sin is not sin at all and that there will be no judgment. Indeed, man, so hardened in his sins and given over to a reprobate mind, does not fear the God of judgment at all. And men, knowing the judgment of God that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in those who do them.

But when the proverbist says that a man must confess and forsake his sins, he points out that one of the cunning ways in which man covers his sins is by a false and superficial confession that pleases men but in which he designs to preserve his sins. He says that he is sorry and repeatedly says that he is sorry. But in spite of all those confessions, he continues impenitently in his sin. His confessions are nothing more than artfully contrived lies.

Or a man says that he is sorry that you were offended at what he did. He says that he is sorry if he hurt you. He says that he is sorry you misunderstood him. He is sorry for the consequences of his sins. He will not bear the consequences of his sins but chafes and rebels and complains against the consequences, as did Cain, who said that his punishment was more than he could bear, or as did Judas, who hung himself in his wicked remorse.

Man covers his sins with a hypocritical life. He appears one way in church and before the people of God, but he lives in a completely different way in his home and on the job. So he covers his sins by a pretense and a show.

Man covers his sins by a total failure to confess and forsake his sins. He covers them by sinning away from the prying eyes of man and supposing that God does not see and will not judge.

Man covers his sins by the folly of indulging his sins, minimizing them, excusing them, denying or extenuating them, diminishing them, dissembling about them, or throwing the blame of them upon others. So he does not confess his real misery or the depth and terribleness of sin.

And does not man seek to cover his sins by a trifle? Perhaps he says, "I have sinned," and perhaps he even says, "I have sinned before God." Even Pharaoh could say that. So could Judas and Saul. But when man says that, he seeks to cover his sins by making a deal with God, by a show of works, or by making up for his sins to God with other deeds. So he seeks to make his own atonement for his sins, to offset his sins by good deeds, or to repay God for the damage of the sins committed.

Is not this perhaps the cleverest of all? A man says, "I have confessed."

And all of that he does before God. He does that first in his heart. Such a man shows that his heart is against God. And in that heart man seeks to cover his sins from the all-seeing eye of God. Man shows that in his heart he loves sin and darkness and that he hates God, who is the light. That is done always by the wicked. The unregenerated man is incapable of confessing his sins, and he always covers his sins in a multitude of ingenious and disgusting ways.

Do not cover but confess your sins! Yes, I am a sinner. I am a sinner. I am a sinner in all my nature and in all that I do. It is a full confession of all your sins. Must you enumerate them? Is that even possible? Do we not seek to enumerate our sins and then simply say with the publican, "I am the sinner"? And do we not confess them to God and finally say with David, "My iniquities are more than the hairs of my head"? So dark and secret are the recesses of the heart that we cry out, "Search my heart, O God, and cleanse me from hidden faults!" Oh, yes,

cleans me with the blood of Christ for the sins that I do not even know and recognize in my life.

Pouring out our hearts before God and to God about our sins, we certainly are able to confess to those against whom we have sinned and those whom we have hurt and injured and to humble ourselves before them.

As common as it is for man to cover his sins and as natural as it is for man to hide his sins, so rare and unnatural to man is the true confession of sins. Confession from the lips of a man is simply a wonder of grace. Confession is astounding, and it astounds.

And forsake your sins! A confession without forsaking is a lie. A confession is confirmed by forsaking. *Forsake* means to break with or, better, to be free from. The man who covers his sins does so because he loves them and indulges them at every turn and because he is in bondage to them. The one who confesses his sins does so because he hates them and because he is free from them. He is free from the condemnation of those sins, and he is free from their dominion.

That is the inmost desire of the heart of the believer. To be free from sin. To be free from his sins. That is the promise of the gospel: the truth shall set you free. That is the perfection of heaven. The believer will be free from all sin in the highest sense of the word. God made Adam free. Adam was free not to sin. Now the unregenerated sinner is not free at all, but he is in bondage to sin and Satan. So he cannot not sin. The highest freedom is the impossibility of sin. That is the freedom of the heart that fears God: freedom from the condemnation of sin and freedom from the pollution and domination of sin through Jesus Christ, the Lord. In his new man the regenerated believer cannot sin. Yet he sins. Daily he sins. He sins daily in all that he does. He is a sinner.

And the question is, what does the one who is free from sin do with his sins? He confesses them, and he forsakes them. He hates sin in his inmost being as that which is offensive to God, and he flees more and more from sin. He desires more and more to be free from sin. So daily he lays sin aside. And daily in the face of sin, in the face of his own sins, he sighs for the perfection of heaven, where there will be perfect freedom from sin.

Because he agrees in his heart with who God says man is. That is what the natural man will not become. He will not become nothing but a sinner. Natural man will be something. He will be anything but a sinner. Oh, yes, he may say, "I am a sinner," but he is not impressed with

what this means. A sinner is a transgressor, who in his sin expresses his deliberate rebellion against God by transgressing his law. A sinner assaults the sovereignty and most high majesty of God and seeks to bring God down from his throne.

Man knows himself not of himself, out of his own wisdom and according to his own investigation. Then he will say, "I am something." Then he will say, "But I try my best to love God and the neighbor!" Then he will call himself anything but the sinner; and so also he will cover his sins, trifle with them before the tribunal of God, excuse them, extenuate them, cast the blame for them on others, or give a hypocritical show of sorrow that works death.

Man must assess himself not according to his own standard but in light of the revelation of God about man. Man must assess himself and his life and all that he does in light of God's word about man. And God's word is that man is a sinner. He may be an unregenerated sinner, or he may be a regenerated sinner, but he is a sinner.

And he must agree not only with God's assessment of who he is but also with God's word about what the sinner deserves. Because of his assault on the sovereignty and most high majesty of God, the sinner is worthy of temporal and eternal punishment.

If I sin against another man, there might be some remedy that I can give. If I steal from someone, then I can pay back fourfold or sevenfold. If I speak evil of a man, then I can go to all those to whom I have spoken evil and repair a man's name and reputation that I ruined and confess myself to be a liar and a slanderer. If I have been cruel to others, then I can confess to them and make that right with them by kind words. If I have played the fool and acted the clod and the boor, then I might repay for my foolishness. That is also what confession of sin involves: making right the wrong with men.

But sins, transgressions against men or transgressions against God, are all transgressions of the law of God. So the sinner must say, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned." There is with that confession also then no remedy for man in man for his sins. One sin is so terrible an offense against the holy, righteous, and glorious God that it deserves a lifetime of misery and afterward that the sinner be cast into outer darkness, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched and where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

With that confession, then, the covering can only come from God. God in mercy must forgive the sinner

God in mercy must forgive
the sinner because in mercy
he covered the sinner's sins.
You may not cover, but God
does cover.

because in mercy he covered the sinner's sins. You may not cover, but God does cover. He does not cover sins after the unrighteous fashion of men, but he covers sins by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. There is the heavenly wisdom of the text: Jesus Christ and him crucified! God calls to foolish men to get wisdom.

Let me tell you of this wisdom of God hid in Jesus Christ that none of the princes of this world knew; and had they known it, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory. Yes, that is right. So wicked is man in his own covering of sins that he refuses God's covering of sins. But from among all the sinful sons of Adam, who would naturally cover their sins and perish, God in his mercy appointed some of those sinful sons of Adam to salvation in Jesus Christ and forgave all their sins from before the foundation of the world. Then, in order to make known his will for their salvation, God in his mercy sent Jesus Christ into the world as the head and mediator of that elect people. God came in the flesh and was made in the likeness of sinful men. God imputed to Jesus Christ all the sins of his elect people. God uncovered all his divine and just wrath against the sins of his people to the uncovered Jesus Christ at Calvary.

There God covered all the sins of all his elect people with the blood of Jesus Christ. That covering is the only covering of sins there is. It is the only covering that God accepts because that covering satisfies God's justice. In that covering alone there is perfect righteousness; holiness; satisfaction; obedience; victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave; and the promise of eternal life beyond the possibility of sin. And God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. God sent the gospel of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ into the world to declare to his people that his wrath is finished, satisfaction has been made, forgiveness was in the cross, and he has reconciled his people to himself in his Son, Jesus Christ.

And God calls all to this wisdom of confessing and forsaking sin. If a man confesses and forsakes sin, that is the fruit of faith in Christ, the fruit of the cross, and the fruit of God's eternal decree for that man's salvation. A man does not hide his sins, because he believes that God hid those sins in the cross of Christ. A man does not cover his sins, because he believes that God covered those sins by the only covering that takes away sins, the blood of Jesus Christ.

The sinner who covers his sins shall not prosper in this life. If he is reprobate and unregenerated, then the wrath of God abides on him, and he goes from hardness to hardness. Perhaps there was in the beginning a twinge of conscience, for all men have to do with the living God, who is angry with the wicked every day. But

hardening himself against the judgments of God, he sears his conscience with a hot iron. Where he at first was satisfied with a little of his sin, soon sin devours him until he exhausts himself in his sins and awakens in outer darkness.

If he is God's own, who has fallen into so terrible a state, God's hand will be heavy on him until he confesses his sins. God never lets his people prosper in their sins. He will dismantle their lives to bring them to confess. For such is God's will for their salvation.

But surely the thought of Proverbs 28:13 means more. All creation must pass through a great process to arrive at the goal that God appointed in the perfect kingdom of Jesus Christ in the new heavens and new earth. Then all the elect church and all the creation with all the angels and all the creatures will be to the praise of God's glory in Jesus Christ, through whom God will rule all things forever.

The sinner who covers his sins will never arrive in that celestial city. Oh, he will go to God. For it is appointed unto men once to die and afterward the judgment. But the sinner who covers his sins will not prosper there in the judgment, but he will hear the words of God, "Depart from me, you wicked evildoer; I never knew you." And such a one will not prosper everlastingly in hell.

There is a promise of God also to the one who confesses his sins: he shall receive mercy. *Mercy* is the tender pity of Jehovah God toward his elect people in their misery and his powerful will to deliver them from that misery.

In his mercy God elected his people. In his mercy he sent Christ to die for the elect and forgave all their sins at the cross. In his mercy he comes to them with the gospel of Christ.

In God's mercy he calls them to stop covering their sins, to confess and forsake those sins.

In his mercy he works the knowledge of sin. In his mercy he arrests his people. In his mercy he turns them, and they are turned.

And heaping mercy upon mercy, God causes them to taste his mercy yet still more. He receives the repentant sinner in mercy and lifts him up through the covering of his sins in the blood of Jesus Christ his Lord.

To receive mercy means that God will testify to you of the pardon of all your sins for Christ's sake; it means that God will not turn away the confessing sinner but will bless him with everlasting peace.

Oh, yes. That is the promise of the gospel to all who confess their sins. The promise is that you will receive mercy, mercy upon mercy.

—NJL

THE *AFSCHEIDING*'S FIRST CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Introduction

In two previous editorials I considered the school issue as it had been faced by two fathers of the Reformed Protestant Churches, Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof.¹ For both Hoeksema and Danhof, the Christian school was the first major issue that they had to contend with in their first charges in the ministry. Henry Danhof labored from 1910 to 1914 to instruct his mostly willing but discouraged congregation in Sully, Iowa, to establish a Christian school. Herman Hoeksema labored from 1914 to 1920 to instruct his unwilling and disobedient congregation in Holland, Michigan, to use the already-established Christian school. Both Hoeksema and Danhof taught that the Christian school was the covenantal obligation of Reformed parents. Both Hoeksema and Danhof grounded the Christian school in God's covenant of grace with believers and their seed.

In this editorial we make our way much further back in time and much farther away to visit a more distant father of the Reformed Protestant Churches. The year is 1834. The place is the Netherlands. The event is the *Afscheiding*, in which God separated his people from the apostate state church in the Netherlands. The father is Douwe J. Vander Werp, teacher.

The Church Situation in the Netherlands at the Time of the Afscheiding

By 1834 the Reformed church in the Netherlands was apostate. The essence of her apostasy was her false doctrine. "In the state church preachers were permitted to deny total depravity, sovereign election, the eternal divinity of Christ, the reality of hell, and even the doctrine of the Trinity."² Some of her ministers were wolves who deliberately and proudly proclaimed the honor of man and the glory of man's society. The rest of her ministers were hirelings who could not find the gospel in a text even if they would grope for it with both hands, a lantern, and a map (though they did not even grope for it, either).

The sermon-fields in which the sheep were made to lie down each week were not the green pastures of Christ but the brown and sear stubble of man. The church was ignorant of the Reformed confessions, even though she paid lip service to them. Her Formula of Subscription was an empty vow, deliberately crafted in such a way that the officebearers could breezily sign it while allowing the doctrine of the Reformed confessions to be savaged on all sides. Her Church Order had been discarded and replaced with the rules of state-appointed bureaucrats. She loved, tolerated, and defended those officebearers and members who raised the banner of man, while she hated and persecuted those officebearers and members who raised their banners in the name of the Lord. She did not sing the rich, spiritual psalms in her public worship but the dribbling hymns of men.

Here is the faithful members' evaluation of the apostasy of the Reformed church in the Netherlands. After rehearsing the corruption that they had witnessed in the years leading up to 1834, they wrote in their Act of Secession or Return,

Taking all of this together, it has now become more than plain that the Netherlands Reformed Church is not the true but the false church, according to God's word and article 29 of our Confession. For this reason the undersigned hereby declare that they in accordance with the office of all believers (article 28) separate themselves from those who are not of the church and therefore will have no more fellowship with the Netherlands Reformed Church until it returns to the true service of the Lord.³

The apostasy of the Reformed church in the Netherlands was a grief to God's people then, as it is now. Two hundred years before 1834, the Reformed church in the Netherlands had flourished in the gospel. Hers was the great Synod of Dordt in 1618–19, at which she wrote and adopted the magnificent Canons of Dordt. In

1 Andrew Lanning, "Herman Hoeksema's First Doctrinal Controversy," *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 6 (November 1, 2022): 7–11; "Henry Danhof and the Christian School in Sully, Iowa," *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 8 (December 1, 2022): 6–12.

2 Marvin Kamps, *1834: Hendrik de Cock's Return to the True Church* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 19.

3 Kamps, Appendix A, Act of Secession or Return, in *1834*, 246.

the Canons she confessed with full voice the doctrine of salvation by God's sovereign, electing grace alone. With the adoption of the Canons, she won the victory over the Remonstrants and their false doctrine of salvation by the will and good pleasure of man. In those years the Reformed church in the Netherlands was a tender mother, with whose breasts of consolation God's spiritual children were fed to the full and in whose bosom they milked out and were delighted with the abundance of her glory (Isa. 66:11).

But by 1834 she was a poxy old crone. Her years of spiritual whoredom from Christ with the idol-doctrine of man had left her diseased and cruel. Her milk was sour, and her thigh was rotten, so that neither her husband nor her children found any spiritual delight in her. The history of her fall into apostasy, which apostasy was also God's judgment upon her, makes both of one's ears to tingle.

The School Situation in the Netherlands at the Time of the Afscheiding

By 1834 the school situation in the Netherlands was just as bad as the church situation. But in order to see how bad the schools were, one must look with a spiritual eye. From an outward point of view, the schools in the Netherlands in 1834 were excellent. There were many schools, many children, many teachers, and a high level of academics. The schools thrived and were the envy of the world. Great men from Germany and France visited the Netherlands to observe the glory of the Dutch schools. All over Europe men knew that "even the peasants in Holland could read and write well."⁴

Not only were the Dutch schools the envy of the academic world, but they appeared to be a beacon of Christian virtue. The church had significant influence in the schools, with pastors often serving also as school overseers. The teachers and students sang psalms in the classrooms. They read the Bible in the classrooms. The children were instructed in moral behavior. The teachers prayed in the classrooms. There was a robust Christian form to the schools in the Netherlands in 1834.

And the industrious Hollanders kept improving their schools. When compared to the schools of even a few brief decades earlier, the schools in the Netherlands in

1834 "were better managed, the teachers better qualified, the physical space healthier, and there seemed to be ample accent on Christianity and virtue, prayer and singing."⁵

But all of the excellence was a façade. Just as the outward excellence of the state Reformed church in 1834—a million members, thousands of ministers, grand church buildings—covered a thorough spiritual rot, so the outward excellence of the schools in 1834 covered their dismal spiritual character. The schools were as corrupt as the church.

What was it that made the schools so corrupt in 1834? This one thing: Reformed doctrine was forbidden in the classroom. The Dutch government, with the connivance of the state Reformed church, permitted and encouraged the schools to display a general Christian veneer, but they explicitly forbade the teaching of Reformed doctrine in the classroom.

It had not always been so. There had been a time in the Netherlands prior to 1834 when the schools had taught Reformed doctrine. In fact, in the more than two hundred years since the Reformation had first come to the Netherlands, the primary goal of the schools in the Netherlands had been to instruct the children in Reformed doctrine. When the Reformation came to the Netherlands, the Reformed church took over from the Roman Catholic Church the education of the children. From that time on "the local Dutch Reformed Church chose the teacher and oversaw the curriculum. Children who attended school were taught the Bible, the Heidelberg Catechism, and Reformed doctrine along with their lessons."⁶

When the Synod of Dordt met in 1618–19, it adopted an education policy as part of its official decisions. The education policy "involved the entire nation in Christian school education."⁷ It laid out the calling of the home, the calling of the school, and the calling of the church, "in order that the Christian youth may be diligently instructed in the principles of religion."⁸ Dordt's decision was widely implemented throughout Europe and was exported to the new world in America.

The Dort Education Policy of 1618 became the education policy not only in Calvinist strongholds such as Holland, Switzerland, France, Scotland, England, and America but also among several non-Calvinist eastern European leaders,

4 Italian historian Guicciardini, quoted in Paul A. Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education* (Colorado Springs, CO: The Association of Christian Schools International, 1998), 1:309.

5 Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, "The Struggle for the Souls of the Children: The Effects of the Dutch Education Law of 1806 on the Emigration of 1847," in Robert P. Swierenga, Donald Sinnema, and Hans Krabbendam, eds., *The Dutch in Urban America* (Holland, MI: The SVH Group, 2004), 39. Much of the information in this article is derived from this source.

6 Sheeres, "The Struggle for the Souls of the Children," 35–36.

7 Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education*, 1:306.

8 The education policy of the Synod of Dordt, as quoted in Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education*, 1:306.

including August Hermann Francke in Germany and John Amos Comenius in Bohemia.⁹

Dordt's education policy required not only that schools be established but also that the children be instructed in Reformed doctrine in the classrooms. Specifically, the schoolmasters were to teach the Heidelberg Catechism to their students. The section of Dordt's education decision regarding the schools reads as follows:

Schools, in which the young shall be properly instructed in the principles of Christian doctrine, shall be instituted not only in cities, but also in towns and country places where heretofore none have existed. The Christian magistracy shall be requested that well-qualified persons may be employed and enabled to devote themselves to the service; and especially that the children of the poor may be gratuitously instructed, and not be excluded from the benefit of the schools. In this office none shall be employed but such as are members of the Reformed Church, having certificates of an upright faith and pious life, and of being well versed in the truths of the Catechism. They are to sign a document, professing their belief in the Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism, and promising that they will give catechetical instruction to the youth in the principles of Christian truth according to the same. The schoolmasters shall instruct their scholars according to their age and capacity, at least two days in the week, not only causing them to commit to memory, but also by instilling into their minds an acquaintance with the truths of the Catechism.¹⁰

It was the policy of the Synod of Dordt that there be schools and that the schools teach Christian doctrine. This policy was carried out throughout the Netherlands from that time on. We even know the textbooks that were used in the city of Utrecht in 1650 in the implementation of this policy: *The Great and Small ABC Book*, the Heidelberg Catechism and the gospels and epistles, *The Stairway of Youth*, *The Mirror of Youth* (Dutch history), the history of David, and Proverbs and Psalms.¹¹

The policy of the Synod of Dordt requiring Reformed doctrine to be taught in the classroom was reversed almost two hundred years later by the French, who had occupied

the Netherlands under Napoleon Bonaparte since 1795. In 1806 the government passed "a new national education law—the Law for Primary School Attendance and Education in the Batavian Republic."¹²

The education law of 1806 appeared to be a real advance in education in the Netherlands. It codified teacher training and certification, ensured proper teachers' salaries, provided clean and safe buildings for instruction, and specified oversight of the education, among many other things. But the real aim of the education law of 1806 was "to instill in the pupil good citizenship, patriotism, Christian virtues, and after 1815, a love for the Dutch Royal House."¹³ The focus of the classroom was no longer Reformed doctrine as that applied to all of life but serving one's country and patriotic unity with one's fellow citizens.

What stood in the way of a united populace, so the government thought, was Reformed doctrine. If the Jew and the Roman Catholic, the Arminian and the Baptist, the Lutheran and the Reformed were all to coexist in society, then they must first coexist in the classroom in their youth. And if they were to coexist in the classroom, then no particular denomination's doctrine could be allowed in the classroom. The most that could be allowed was a thin patina of Christianity, a veneer of virtuous moralism. Therefore, the education law of 1806 forbade the teaching of Reformed doctrine and forbade any instruction in Reformed doctrine.

What did the corrupt state Reformed church think of this? She embraced the law with both arms. The historian Janet Sjaarda Sheeres reports the state church's response.

The Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church came out in favor of this public school system, not surprising since the Reformed Church's hierarchy were all handpicked by the Government. For men like Petrus Hofstede de Groot, professor of theology at the University of Groningen and a school supervisor, this new law was "...a brilliant law...the crown jewel of all our laws." For the overwhelming majority of the population, it seemed right to have one educational system available to all, with its aim being the welfare of society as a whole.

Hofstede de Groot, the man well known as Hendrik de Cock's adversary, saw the need for a uniform public school system as a way to prevent

9 Paul A. Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education* (Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design Publications, 2005), 2:109.

10 Quoted in Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education*, 1:306–7.

11 Dutch historian William H. Kirkpatrick, quoted in Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education*, 1:307.

12 Sheeres, "The Struggle for the Souls of the Children," 36.

13 Sheeres, "The Struggle for the Souls of the Children," 38.

national unrest and disunity. According to De Groot, “Just think what could happen if many schools would arise. All these schools would immediately become sectarian schools. First, schoolboys from the various sectarian schools call each other names, soon they engage in fist-fights, later when grown, they use swords against each other, and the next thing you have an entire overthrow like that of 1795, and the fact that the house of Orange could be driven into exile becomes a real threat.”¹⁴

That is all it took for the schools to become rotten: the removal of Reformed doctrine from the classroom! The schools could be outwardly excellent, but without Reformed doctrine they were antichristian. Reformed doctrine is the gospel. Only Reformed doctrine is the gospel. Roman Catholic doctrine is not the gospel. Lutheran doctrine after Luther is not the gospel. Baptist doctrine is not the gospel. Arminian doctrine is not the gospel. Not even the doctrine of nominally Reformed churches is the gospel. Only Reformed doctrine is the gospel. When Reformed doctrine was removed from the classrooms in the Netherlands, the entirely predictable and inevitable result was that the schools became corrupt. Without Reformed doctrine all of the instruction was merely shallow moralism. The living, vital gospel of Jesus Christ and his truth did not infuse the instruction, but only the empty virtue of the pagan. In such a classroom the Jew and the Roman Catholic, the Arminian and the Baptist, the Lutheran and the nominally Reformed could all comfortably coexist. And coexist they did.

But there was one religion in the Netherlands that suffered under the corruption of the church and the school in the 1800s. That religion was the only true religion: the Reformed faith. The ones who suffered were those who were not Reformed merely in name but who believed and held the Reformed faith according to the Reformed confessions. Although most of the members of the state church rejoiced in the new school laws, these few Reformed folk mourned the loss of the Heidelberg Catechism and Reformed doctrine in their schools. They were held as spiritual captives in a spiritual Babylon, and they longed for the recovery of the gospel in both the church and the school.

The Afscheiding

God’s people in the state church had used every means at their disposal to bring reformation within the church,

but the church persisted in her wicked false doctrine. God brought reformation to his beleaguered people in the Netherlands on Tuesday, October 14, 1834. On that date two elders and three deacons in the church in Ulrum, the Netherlands, presented to their congregation an Act of Secession or Return, which the five officebearers had signed the day before. Most of the congregation gathered on the evening of October 14 to hear and consider the Act, after which they voiced their agreement. By this Act of Secession or Return, the congregation of Ulrum formally separated from the apostate state church and reformed the church on the basis of scripture and the confessions. The *Afscheiding* had begun.

Because of this Act of Secession or Return, the congregation of Ulrum became the object of the wrath of the populace and the opposition of the authorities. Janet Sjaarda Sheeres tells the gripping events of the first Sunday after the signing of the Act of Secession or Return, when the congregation of Ulrum and its pastor, Hendrik de Cock, attempted to worship in their church building.

The following Sunday the people marched en masse to the church building, mistakenly thinking it was theirs. The police had been informed and would not allow De Cock access to the pulpit. When Johannes van der Helm from Niekerk, who had been called [by the state] to preach that day, attempted to gain access to the pulpit, the people would not let him pass. Fearing trouble, he left. De Cock then tried to make his way to the stairs of the pulpit but was halted by an officer. Still determined to preach, he climbed on one of the front pews and preached from there. After the service, when the people had left the church, the doors were locked behind them. Since they were now effectively barred from their building, they held their afternoon service outside. The Secession had become fact; there was no going back.¹⁵

Douwe J. Vander Werp and the Afscheiding

Staying at the home of De Cock in Ulrum at the time of the *Afscheiding* was a young schoolteacher by the name of Douwe J. Vander Werp. Before the *Afscheiding*, Vander Werp had taught for a few years in a neighboring town. But because of Vander Werp’s support for Hendrik de Cock, who had been suspended by the state church, Vander Werp had been dismissed from the school in May of 1834. De Cock took Vander Werp into his home, where Vander Werp continued to assist De Cock “full

¹⁴ Sheeres, “The Struggle for the Souls of the Children,” 38.

¹⁵ Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, *Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 36–37.

time with his enormous amount of paper work.”¹⁶ In De Cock’s home Vander Werp not only had a front-row seat to all of the events that would lead up to the *Afscheiding*, but Vander Werp also played a role in those events. For example, while De Cock was suspended but before the congregation of Ulrum separated from the state church, Vander Werp read sermons on Sundays to an assembly of those children of God who could not in good conscience attend the corrupt state church.

The week after the *Afscheiding*, the De Cock family suffered the wrath of the authorities. De Cock was fined and sentenced to three months in jail, and his family eventually would be evicted from the parsonage. Vander Werp was not yet fined, but he was evicted from the town of Ulrum.

Tensions ran high during the week that followed, and the authorities, fearing another mob the following Sunday, called in the military. On the Saturday preceding, one hundred soldiers marched into Ulrum, took over the town, and posted twelve men in the parsonage. No one was allowed in or out of the house. Vander Werp, working on some correspondence, was asked if he was a member of the family. When he said no, they pushed him out the door and told him to get out of town.¹⁷

Where would Vander Werp go then? His only option seemed to be the town of Smilde in the province of Drenthe. God’s people in Smilde were eager for reformation. They mourned the apostasy of the state church, and they were thrilled with De Cock’s preaching. A peat farmer from Smilde, Luitsen Dijkstra, would often walk the nine hours from Smilde to Ulrum to meet with De Cock and to worship with those saints in Ulrum who could not attend the state church.

What was striking about the Reformed in Smilde was that their desire for reformation went hand in hand with their desire for a good Christian school. By 1834 the saints in Smilde were well aware of the corruption in the schools. They longed for a school of their own in which they could rear their children. With that in mind, Dijkstra had some time earlier invited Vander Werp to come to Smilde. “Dijkstra hoped that as soon as the people in Smilde had formed a Secession congregation, they would also start a Christian school for their children.”¹⁸ Cast out of Ulrum, Vander Werp now made his way to Smilde in the province of Drenthe.

The Afscheiding’s First Christian School

The *Afscheiding* in Ulrum was only a few weeks old when Vander Werp arrived in Smilde. Janet Sjaarda Sheeres tells the story of how the members of the congregation in Smilde joined with their brethren in Ulrum in separating from the state Reformed church.

[In Smilde Vander Werp] soon found himself the center of attention, as the secession-minded Christians in the community were eager to hear about the events in Ulrum. For the next several days, Vander Werp, who boarded with the Sickens family, met with various families in the area to discuss secession matters.

Sunday, November 9, 1834, at Dijkstra’s invitation, Vander Werp led a large group in worship, after which the former read the procedures for secession. The group decided to meet the following Friday to sign the Act of Secession. They dispatched Dijkstra to Ulrum to bring De Cock to Smilde to formally organize the congregation. When De Cock arrived, he brought with him the news that Scholte had also seceded with his congregation from the Reformed Church in Doeveren—news that greatly encouraged the Ulrum and Smilde seceders.¹⁹

The saints in Smilde saw the formation of a Christian school as going hand in hand with the reformation of the church. Indeed, one of the reasons the saints in Smilde so longed for the reformation of the church was that they might also form a Christian school. Upon their decision to join the *Afscheiding*, the saints in Smilde immediately formed a Christian school. And with the formation of their Christian school, they immediately faced the opposition of their enemies. Again, Sheeres tells the tale.

Another item heavy on the hearts of the *Afgescheiden* at Smilde and elsewhere concerned the school situation. Many parents were keeping their children out of school because of new state requirements barring the Bible and the Heidelberg Catechism from being taught in the public schools, and also because in 1823 the state had decreed that all children attending school be immunized against smallpox.

Many of the Seceders were against vaccination...

Dijkstra and two other men formed a Christian school board and hired Vander Werp to teach at five cents per child per week. The day after

16 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 30.

17 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 37.

18 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 37–38.

19 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 39.

they had pledged to incorporate themselves as an *Afscheiden* congregation, they brought their children to the barn of Willem Snippe²⁰ to begin school. Taking in his new teaching surroundings, Vander Werp undoubtedly was reminded of Jesus' humble beginnings in a barn. Tables and benches had been set up for the pupils in one corner of Snippe's barn, while in another corner there were pens for pigs, cattle, and poultry. Faggots of dried heather for fuel and hay for the cattle were stored in yet another corner. Twenty children attended the first day. This became the very first organized private school based on Reformed teachings in the Netherlands, with Vander Werp as the first teacher. The date was November 10, 1834.

In their enthusiasm, or perhaps their ignorance, the organizers made a grave error by not applying for permission from the provincial authorities to operate a private school. They also neglected to note that H. Doorenbos, pastor of the Smilde Reformed Church and school supervisor for the district, had kept them under strict surveillance. Doorenbos's preaching had not sat well with the conservative element of Smilde's Reformed Church. Soon after his arrival in 1820, the congregants quietly began to stay away from the services, meeting instead in conventicles led by lay preachers. Now seeing how this new school was draining students from the existing state-run public school, Doorenbos wrote immediately to the governor of the province of Drenthe, citing names and places and calling Vander Werp a troublemaker who defied the existing school laws. The letter, dated November 11, 1834, brought swift retribution.

On November 13, at eleven in the morning, the mayor, a policeman, and a municipal clerk appeared in the barn with a court order to fine Vander Werp for operating a public school without proper permission. They also declared the schoolroom a fire hazard and an unhealthy place. They closed it the same day. According to Mayor Kymmell, "The children were so afraid of that dark place and the fiery teacher that some had run away crying, while others could not sleep at night."

Vander Werp decided not to challenge the law. He gave up his teaching career, but not without consequences. For teaching without a license

he was fined fifty guilders and court costs of two guilders and thirty-nine cents—a hefty sum for someone getting paid only in nickels.²¹

The timeline of the first school of the *Afscheiding* is astonishing. The school was established the day after the saints in Smilde joined the *Afscheiding*. On Sunday they announced their intention to secede. On Monday they opened their own school. And before a week had passed, they had been closed down by their opponents.

Tuesday, October 14, 1834	The <i>Afscheiding</i> begins in Ulrum with the Act of Secession or Return
Sunday, November 9, 1834	The saints in Smilde declare their intention to secede
Monday, November 10, 1834	The <i>Afscheiding's</i> first school meets in Smilde in Snippe's barn with twenty students and the twenty-three-year-old Vander Werp as teacher
Tuesday, November 11, 1834	The state church minister informs the state authorities of the school
Thursday, November 13, 1834	The state descends upon the school, fines Vander Werp, and closes the school

A Few Observations

First, the history of the *Afscheiding's* first Christian school illustrates the inseparable relationship between church reformation and the Christian school. It is imperative for the true church that she have her own schools. The doctrine of the church is the doctrine of the schools. A Reformed parent who will not suffer his family to be indoctrinated in a false church cannot then turn around and suffer his children to be indoctrinated in the schools of the false church. This history serves as a rebuke to me and to many Reformed Protestant people who thought that we could still be part of the Protestant Reformed schools after our own Act of Separation from the Protestant Reformed Churches. Whether we thought that we could only finish the 2020–21 school year in the Protestant Reformed schools or that we could use the Protestant Reformed schools indefinitely, we were inconsistent in our view of the church and our view of the school. We thought that

20 Interestingly, in God's wonderful and mysterious ways, Willem Snippe of Smilde, Drenthe, the Netherlands, in 1834 is a direct ancestor of one of the members of First Reformed Protestant Church in 2023—Mr. Brent Snippe. The first school of the *Afscheiding* met in Willem Snippe's barn in Smilde, and almost two hundred years later, Brent Snippe serves on the school board of Grace Reformed Protestant School, one of the first schools in the Reformed Protestant denomination, which denomination was also begun by an Act of Separation.

21 Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 40–41.

we could tolerate the one even as we could not tolerate the other. The Lord graciously delivered us from our own folly by closing the Protestant Reformed schools to some of us, so that we were left with no choice but to start our own Reformed Protestant schools. No Reformed Protestant man can say that his own faithfulness accounts for the schools. All Reformed Protestant men must say that we are poor and blind and naked, that the Lord alone gave our Reformed Protestant schools to us, and that he did so at a time when we particularly did not deserve them. The history of the *Afscheiding* and our own history remind us that, truly, “the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations” (Ps. 100:5).

Second, the history of the *Afscheiding*'s first Christian school in Smilde resonates with the Reformed believer who knows the Christian school to be the demand of the covenant. God's covenant of grace with believers and their seed does not—cannot—leave the people of God adrift from each other. God binds his people to himself in covenant love and, in so doing, binds them to each other. Also in the rearing of their covenant seed, God's people are bound together in God's covenant of grace with the covenant cords of God's covenant love. It is not a shock to the Reformed believer that the church in Smilde joined the *Afscheiding* on Sunday, November 9, and started a school on Monday, November 10. The Reformed believer simply recognizes the establishment of the school as the necessary and inevitable and required fruit of the covenant. To paraphrase one Reformed Protestant man's comments of late, “The spirit of the covenant asks what time church starts on Sunday and what time school starts on Monday.”

In fact, the establishment of Christian schools would become a prominent legacy of the descendants of the *Afscheiding* in America. Writing about the Christian Reformed Church, which in its early days of orthodoxy could trace its history and doctrine directly to the

Afscheiding, Marvin Kamps relates,

Parents in the Christian Reformed Church sacrificed to establish Christian grade schools, high schools, and even colleges for the training of covenant children. From New York to California and throughout the United States, Christian teachers taught the children the entire curriculum in the light of scripture. It was a labor of love for God and for their Lord Jesus Christ. Parents saw their commitment to Christian education as a solemn duty. No sacrifice was too great. One reality characterized the parents' rearing of their children: they were focused on and aimed at the glory of God's name in the lives of their children. They possessed a covenantal, generational perspective in all their teaching and guiding of their redeemed and sanctified children according to God's purpose of election; they knew they were laying the foundation for the rearing of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They were Reformed, that is, they cherished a covenantal perspective in the care of their children; they were the spiritual descendants of De Cock and the church of Ulrum.²²

Third, the history of the first Christian school of the *Afscheiding* demonstrates that life for God's people in the Netherlands was becoming more and more impossible. The first Christian school lasted only four days before the government closed it down, with Vander Werp's acquiescence, according to the official record.²³ The government's oppression of the *Afscheiding* churches and schools was more and more squeezing God's people in the Netherlands, so that they began to look overseas. It is to that history that we will turn our attention next time, the Lord willing.

—AL

22 Kamps, 1834, xiv.

23 From the document “Interrogation of Douwe Vander Werp, November 11, 1834, in Smilde,” translated by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres in Sheeres, *Son of Secession*, 179–80. Question and answer 9 of the interrogation reads, “Q. Do you think that you will be able to continue with this school? A. No, I want to give it up now.” Personally, I wonder whether the state officials who interrogated Vander Werp were entirely honest in their report of his answer. Vander Werp's answer, as the officials report it, is entirely out of harmony with Vander Werp's life up to that point. Although he was only twenty-three years old, he had already suffered tremendously for the cause of the *Afscheiding*. He had fallen out of favor with his beloved parents for his support of De Cock; he had been fired from his teaching position in a neighboring town earlier in the year, likely because of his support of De Cock; he had illegally read sermons on Sundays to a gathering of saints who could not in good conscience go to the state church; in those meetings he had pressed upon God's people the need for church reformation, contrary to the law of the land; he had lived with De Cock and his family and had assisted with the mountain of correspondence; he had been exiled from Ulrum; his friend and mentor De Cock would soon be on his way to prison; Vander Werp himself lived with the constant threat of fines and imprisonment over his head; he had been a front-row spectator and participant in the *Afscheiding* in both Ulrum and Smilde; and then a fine had been levied on him that he could not possibly pay. After all of that, the answer, “No, I want to give it up now” simply does not make sense. Perhaps the young Vander Werp was caught in a moment of weakness and indecision; perhaps the officials reported what they wanted to hear in order to weaken the cause of the *Afscheiding* in Smilde. We may never know, but whatever the case, Vander Werp and the *Afscheiding* were not characterized by the words, “No, I want to give it up now.” Rather, they were characterized by losing their lives and then losing their lives again for the sake of the gospel.

From the headquarters of *Sword and Shield* in the wintry Midwest comes this February edition of the magazine. The arrival of *Sword and Shield* remains the best reason that I can think of to keep the mailbox propped up all winter after the snowplow blasts it off its post. And I hear that the magazine's arrival each month is still an exciting event in many households, even a good two and a half years into publication and even if a winter issue occasionally arrives cold and damp and with one corner encrusted in snow. So pull off your mittens, pull on some slippers, and settle in for the February issue. And for those who are minded to burn the magazine instead of reading it, remember to dry it out first.

In this issue there is a wide selection of writers to choose

from. The regular rubrics of two editors are in their usual places, while the third editor plans to continue his series in the March issue. Mrs. Connie Meyer continues her excellent series on the law-gospel distinction as it applies to Christian education. Mr. Elijah Roberts addresses brotherly instruction and warning to those Reformed Protestant sympathizers and friends who nevertheless remain members in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Also in this issue are edifying and instructive articles by two Reformed Protestant seminarians, Mr. Tyler Ophoff and Mr. Garrett Varner.

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

—AL

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

UNFORGIVEN (1): A HYPOCRITE SPEAKS

Prof. Barry Gritters recently gave a speech at the request of Grace Protestant Reformed Church's evangelism committee. The speech was entitled "The Confusion about Forgiveness."¹ Professor Gritters is not normally so forthcoming as he was in this speech. He prefers to work behind the scenes, pulling levers like the Wizard of Oz or quietly playing the backroom politician. He was asked many questions after the speech. He normally answers questions with questions. But that night he came out with his theology. Some of the questions were quite insightful. I hope that after the questioners got their answers they fled.

In the speech Professor Gritters said, "Forgiveness is not in eternity." He likewise denied that there was forgiveness at the cross. He called the cross a "provision." Whatever he meant by that exactly, he did not tell the audience. I suppose that the cross as a "provision" means that the cross provided some objective basis of salvation.

But, denigrating the cross of Christ with all his might, Professor Gritters assured his audience repeatedly that there was not forgiveness at the cross. Forgiveness is—and only is—a declaration of God: "God's forgiveness of us is a declaration to us from his mouth to our ears that goes down into our hearts that embrace that declaration by faith." That declaration comes after—and only after—repentance: "That declaration comes to us after confession and repentance." Even then, there is forgiveness only for those sins that we specifically confess:

There are other sins that we never confess. Some of them we don't even know we committed; some of them are sins of omission we never think about...If we die not thinking about some of them, you might say that you're not forgiven of those sins...We die unforgiven of that sin, that is,

¹ Barrett Gritters, "The Confusion about Forgiveness," speech given at Grace Protestant Reformed Church on November 3, 2022. The speech can be found at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=11522113504354>.

not that Jesus didn't die and pay for that sin, but that I didn't hear God say to me, "I don't hold it against you." Forgiveness, again, is God's declaration to us, "I forgive you."

That was the message of the speech: unforgiven!

Unforgiven in eternity.

Unforgiven at the cross.

Unforgiven when you die.

This is truly appalling theology. Let the defenders of the Protestant Reformed Churches, such as Prof. D. Engelsma, defend this speech! Let's have a letter setting us all straight on how orthodox the Protestant Reformed Churches are as evidenced by this speech, given by a professor of theology in the Protestant Reformed seminary, whom one would suppose is their leading light.

In the face of Professor Gritters' denial that there was forgiveness at the cross of Christ and in eternity and in the face of his assertion that forgiveness is only a declaration after a confession of some sin, an astute question came from the audience: "What's the biblical basis for defining forgiveness as primarily a *declaration*? Colossians 2 and Ephesians 1 seem to indicate that forgiveness is at the cross." The questioner did not indicate to which verses of Colossians 2 and Ephesians 1 he referred. Perhaps it was Ephesians 1:7: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Or perhaps it was Colossians 2:13–14:

13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

"Redemption" is what Ephesians 1:7 calls the cross of Jesus Christ, and the verse says that this redemption is the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 2:13–14 says that, blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us by nailing it to Christ's cross, God forgave all our sins. In the face of these testimonies of the Holy Spirit, yes, pray tell, Professor Gritters, what of the scriptures that explicitly say that there *was* forgiveness at the cross, so plainly that a ten-year-old could tell you that this is what these passages mean?

Making sure that no one left the speech that night thinking too much of the cross of Christ or of the decree of God, Professor Gritters replied to the questioner:

Yeah, that's a great question. Uh, I did talk about that somewhat in my speech. Let me clarify: Colossians 2 and Ephesians 1 seem to indicate that forgiveness is at the cross because there is such a close connection between the *judicial ground of forgiveness* in the cross and the *forgiveness that God declares to me* in my lifetime—sometimes such that that's called *forgiveness*, just as sometimes God's *decree* is called forgiveness. But if we would be *careful*, though those are the root of forgiveness and the basis for forgiveness, this is forgiveness: this declaration. Remember that song: "When I confessed transgression, *then* thou forgavest me." When was that? When Nathan the prophet came and spoke; he declared.

Maybe a different perspective I didn't use tonight is that forgiveness is the *negative half* of justification. Justification has a negative side—God forgives sin—and a positive side where God imputes to you the righteousness of Christ. He says, "I take away your sins; I give you the righteousness of Christ." That's the concept of *justification*.

When does justification take place? Well, it takes place, as the Bible says, by faith. When the judge declares to me, "Not guilty," and the judge also declares to me, "You're righteous."

Justification has its root in eternity, its basis in the cross, but takes place *when* God speaks to me. That is why in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee went home unjustified. And the Bible says that the publican went home justified. He came to the temple miserable; he left the temple justified because he *heard* God say to him when he beat his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he heard God say to him, "You're justified."

For Professor Gritters, scripture—which cannot lie—only calls the cross forgiveness because there is such a close association of the cross with forgiveness. His other admission, that scripture also calls the decree forgiveness, is startling. I would like to hear of the scriptural passages that say this. The decree forgiving all of the elect their sins is a doctrine of good and necessary consequence from the teaching of scripture that the cross is eternal, for instance in Revelation 13:8: "All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The reasoning is this: if Christ was slain in eternity and if there was forgiveness at the cross, then there was a decree

That was the message of the speech: unforgiven!

to forgive all the sins of God's people in eternity. Regardless of the lack of a scriptural passage, however, Professor Gritters made the same argument about the decree as he made about the cross: the scripture only calls the decree forgiveness because there is such a close association between the decree and forgiveness. But there was no forgiveness in eternity, and there was no forgiveness at the cross.

Unforgiven you are from all eternity.

Unforgiven you are at the cross of Jesus Christ.

This close association of the cross and the decree is realized only when you repent.

Then the professor became bold. Asserting what many Protestant Reformed ministers—including Rev. M. McGeown—deny, Professor Gritters said that forgiveness is part of justification. Thus when he was talking about forgiveness, he was speaking about justification. If, according to Gritters, you are unforgiven at the cross and unforgiven in eternity, then you are likewise unjustified at the cross and unjustified in eternity.

It should be noted that many Protestant Reformed ministers—in the interest of denying the gracious justification of the sinner by faith only and in the interest of teaching the false doctrine of the forgiveness of the sinner by faith, repentance, and obedience—deny that justification and forgiveness are the same doctrine. The thinking goes like this: scripture teaches so clearly that we are justified by faith alone that we cannot deny it, so we will make a distinction between justification and forgiveness. Then we can teach justification by faith alone; but when we come to teaching the truth of forgiveness, we can talk about the sinner's experience. We will teach that the sinner is justified by faith alone; nevertheless, the sinner does not have the experience of justification (forgiveness) until and unless he repents, believes, and is nice to his neighbor.

The whole distinction is complete nonsense and is demolished on Christ's parable of the publican, who went home justified (forgiven), and on article 23 of the Belgic Confession, which summarizes justification by speaking of the forgiveness of our sins: "We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins [forgiveness] for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God [justification] is implied" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 51).

But Professor Gritters apparently departed from his colleagues and denied the distinction between justification and forgiveness. For him it clarifies his position that we were not forgiven in eternity and that we were not forgiven at the cross to say that we were not justified in eternity and that we were not justified at the cross. We are only justified (forgiven) in time after we repent.

At least he disagrees with one of the most baseless and unscriptural distinctions yet to come out of the mouths and from the pens of Protestant Reformed ministers, and he agrees with the Reformed Protestant Churches—and about all of the Reformed tradition—that forgiveness and justification are the same, forgiveness being one part of justification.

However, in his assertion that we were not justified at the cross, he runs afoul yet again of the Holy Ghost—and the Reformed tradition. For the Holy Ghost—who cannot lie—said in Romans 4:25 concerning Jesus Christ, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." This passage means that Jesus Christ was delivered because of our offenses, and he was raised again because of our justification. The passage teaches explicitly in words no man can gainsay that we were justified at the cross. Because justification is the same as forgiveness, we were also forgiven at the cross.

Thus the thesis of Professor Gritters' entire speech and the theology on which the entire speech was based is dashed on the rock of scripture. If not, then Christ has not risen. This also points out the deadly seriousness of Gritters' assertion that we were not justified (forgiven) at the cross. He denies the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For if we were not justified at the cross, then Christ is not risen from the dead. And if Christ is not risen, God is a liar, the apostles were all false witnesses of Christ's resurrection, we do not rise, our faith is vain, and we are still in our sins.

Unforgiven!

I applaud Professor Gritters for making clear how thoroughly and completely his denomination denies the gospel of grace.

If he were to read this article, then I would also tell him to repent. I would also say to him, "It's about time, Barry." When his denomination was in the middle of a life-and-death struggle for the truth of the gospel, he was nowhere to be found except in the back rooms of synodical meetings and of the *Standard Bearer* office and out and about making false and lying charges of sin against the men who had started *Sword and Shield*. In light of the content of his speech about repentance and forgiveness, I judge him unforgiven, since he has never sought the forgiveness of the men against whom he lied. He has never shown the least hint of repentance for his false accusations and slander of those men publicly and behind their backs and through which he finally engineered their ecclesiastical destruction so that he could take over their inheritance and make himself a garden of herbs.

For example, after *Sword and Shield* came out, Professor Gritters, along with the other two editors of the

Standard Bearer, Prof. R. Dykstra and Rev. K. Koole, charged me with sins for my involvement in sending a letter to them and the board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA), expressing dissatisfaction with their leadership at the *Standard Bearer*. They charged me with sins via a letter in an email. A letter! An email! Surely, they took the whole matter of charging sins very seriously! They assured me in their letter that they were trying to keep the matter private; but they threatened that if I did not repent of my misdeeds within seven days, they would take the matter to my consistory. They assured me in their letter that they were very concerned for my soul and my salvation. They were so concerned for my soul and my salvation, in fact, that it took the editors nine months after my alleged transgressions to send the email/letter to me. Not a word for nine months, and then came charges of sin by a group of men against a brother and that via an email/letter, which included the threat that they would immediately take the matter to my consistory if I did not repent soon enough. Assuring me in their letter that they were very careful to follow Matthew 18, they also reserved the right for themselves to stop following Matthew 18 whenever it suited them and to go directly to my consistory.

Could it perhaps be that the editors thought that such charges of sin would be a convenient way to threaten me? If that did not work, then to attack me at my consistory in order to have me suspended or at least to stop my writing in *Sword and Shield*? The final judgment will reveal that. When I actually took their charges to my consistory, the editors were incensed and insisted on meeting with the consistory to bring their charges of sin against me in person.

The editors made a farce out of Christ's instruction in Matthew 18. They made a farce out of charges of sin. They made a farce out of brotherly love in the church. The charges were so transparently false and self-serving that even the elders of Crete Protestant Reformed Church dismissed the charges. And that is saying something because those same men a few months later trumped up some of their own charges of sin against me.

Professor Gritters and the other members of the editorial Cerberus at the *Standard Bearer* did the same thing to Rev. Martin VanderWal and Rev. Andy Lanning. When Reverend Lanning's case came to Classis East, even that Reformed Sanhedrin could not affirm the charges.

Did Professor Gritters repent for his false charges and his abuse of the whole practice of charging sin and of

brotherly love? He did not. He acted as though he had never tried for months to have false charges of sin brought against three ministers in good standing.

This is just one example. I have others. I was charged with sins so many times by the editors of the *Standard Bearer*—Professor Gritters included—that it became obvious to me that those men are carnal and that all their professed concern for my salvation was simply a lie, a ploy, a tactic, and intimidation.

Just one more example to make the point that Professor Gritters is the least qualified person to speak about forgiveness, repentance, and forgiving one another. When I wrote a letter responding against Reverend Koole's October 1, 2018, *Standard Bearer* article in which he talked about what a man must do to be saved, and I sent the letter to the *Standard Bearer* office, the editors promptly refused to publish the letter. So I published it on the RFPA blog. This set off a firestorm. Professor Gritters, along with the other editors, demanded an immediate meeting with the board of the RFPA in order to try and force the RFPA to take down my blog post. The demands continued for weeks. When the editors finally had a meeting with the RFPA board, the editors behind my back charged

me with sin at that meeting. Even the unprincipled men at the RFPA understood that that board meeting was no place to bring charges of sin and that perhaps the editors ought to go the way of Matthew 18 or make a case pending with my consistory. And the board members told the editors so.

Of course, so great was the editors'—Professor Gritters included—concern for my salvation that for months I did not hear about their charges of sin against me; and even then, I did not hear from the editors until after I submitted another article for publication in the *Standard Bearer*, at which time the editors informed me via email of their charges of sin and threatened that unless I repented, I would never again be published in the *Standard Bearer*. There was no follow-up to their charges. That passed for godliness at the time in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Lord will bring all that abuse out in the day of judgment, and I await that day, for as Professor Gritters reminded everyone in the speech, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).

And it was not just Reverend VanderWal, Reverend Lanning, and I who were charged with sin; it was Prof. D. Engelsma as well. He was charged with sin by Professor

He denies the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For if we were not justified at the cross, then Christ is not risen from the dead.

Gritters at two different consistories. Professor Gritters charged Professor Engelsma with the sin of transgressing scripture's teaching about divorce for Professor Engelsma's position that an abused spouse may file for legal separation. Professor Gritters first went court shopping by trying to force Crete Protestant Reformed Church to give up Professor Engelsma's credentials and to send them to Trinity Protestant Reformed Church so that its consistory would try the case. When that did not work, he charged Professor Engelsma with sin at Crete's consistory. After Crete's elders rejected the charge, did Professor Gritters apologize to Professor Engelsma? Did Professor Gritters apologize to the consistories for the false charge? Or, if he disagreed with the judgment of Crete's consistory, did he take it to classis? No, he did not. The charge of sin is still standing to this day.

When I read all his pious-sounding explanations of how to go the way of Matthew 18 and how to forgive brethren, I wanted to puke. When Professor Gritters spoke about repentance and forgiveness and going to a brother who sins against you, he was being a complete hypocrite. He made false charges of sin, he did not follow up on his charges of sin, he used or ran roughshod over Matthew 18 as it was convenient for him, and he made charges of sin against men to others without ever going personally to the men he charged with sins. Then when there was real sin, he did nothing if it would hurt the reputation of a friend. Thus he allowed that friend to continue his predations on the sheep and the lambs, especially on the ewes, and to disgrace the office of the minister of the word. He used charges of sin to coerce, to intimidate, and to get his way. A charge of sin is a very serious thing, but Professor Gritters treated it as a weapon. I have been on the receiving end of his abuse, his fake charges of sin, and his false professions of concern for someone's soul. I view him as an abuser, a fraud, and a hypocrite. But then again, the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches like those kinds of people, place them in positions of honor and respectability, applaud them for their great spirituality, and ask them to give speeches on topics for which they are wholly unqualified.

It is no wonder, then, that Professor Gritters' speech was false doctrine about forgiveness. He knows nothing

of forgiveness. In his own practice he may use the doctrine as it suits his purposes, and his doctrine is consequently a doctrine of man's decisive role in his own forgiveness. In his speech he gave his theory on forgiveness. It was only that: his theory. The speech by Professor Gritters was simply a concoction of truth and sophistry. The theology of the speech was the false doctrine that Professor Gritters had fabricated out of his own brain and then passed off as biblical through the corruption of scripture and lip service to the Reformed creeds. He openly admitted in the speech, the purpose of which was to clear up confusion on forgiveness, that he was not going to quote the Reformed creeds much. When he did mention the creeds, all he did was quote them. Could that be because the creeds refute his false doctrine about forgiveness? The

warning of Colossians 2:8 must be issued against the speech: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." That is all this speech was: philosophy and vain deceit that spoils now and eternally.

The entire speech can be summarized in a few words. The speech was part and parcel of the Protestant Reformed theology that denigrates the decree of God, displaces the cross of Jesus

Christ, ignores the work of the Holy Spirit, and makes the sinner's possession and enjoyment of his salvation depend upon what he does.

The message of the speech was that there was no forgiveness in eternity.

The message of the speech was that there was no forgiveness at the cross.

There is no forgiveness until the sinner repents. There is no forgiveness of any sins for which the sinner does not specifically repent.

A sinner can even remain unforgiven when he dies!
Unforgiven!

The message of the speech was that the repentance of the sinner is the decisive activity upon which the decree of God, the cross of Christ, and the forgiveness of the sinner depend for their realization now and at the death of the sinner.

Even more succinctly, the speech was part and parcel of the Protestant Reformed theology that in a certain and vital sense, man precedes God: man must first draw

The message of the speech was that the repentance of the sinner is the decisive activity upon which the decree of God, the cross of Christ, and the forgiveness of the sinner depend for their realization now and at the death of the sinner.

near to God, and then God will draw near to man, and there are activities of man that precede the blessings of God.

To use the language of Professor Gritters' speech: God decreed to forgive, God made the provision for forgiveness at the cross of Christ, God is willing to forgive, and God wants you to come back to him. But do not forget that you do not have forgiveness in eternity. You do not have forgiveness at the cross of Christ. You do not have anything that God decreed, that Jesus Christ provided for, and that God wants for you and is willing to give you unless and until you repent. The speech was Arminian to the core.

Worse, the speech was Roman Catholic theology. That kind of theology turned the sensitive Martin Luther into a spiritual lunatic, who scoured his life for sins to confess so that he could experience peace with God. The theology of the Roman Catholic Church was the following:

First of all, one must go to confession. This was not optional but absolutely required. Indeed, it was a sacrament "of the Church." So one must go to confession, and when one went to confession, one must confess every sin one could possibly recall.²

Here is a description of the tortured Luther:

Luther's overactive mind was constantly finding ways in which he had fallen short, and so every time he went to confession, he confessed all of his sins, as he was supposed to do, but then, knowing that even one unconfessed sin would be enough to drag him down to hell, he racked his brain for more sins and found more. There was no end to them if one was honest about one's thoughts, and Luther was entirely honest. What if he left confession but had forgotten to confess one errant foul thought from three days before? If one died before one had one's last rites, one died "in one's sins." So Luther would drive himself and his confessor half-mad with his endless confessions, which seemed to make him feel no better, because he would torture himself after-

ward, feeling that surely he must have forgotten something.³

That is the difference between Martin Luther and Barry Gritters: Luther was honest, and Gritters is not. Luther was honest about himself, about sin, and about God until he could find comfort only in the righteousness of Christ, for which he did nothing. Gritters is dishonest about God and the cross of Christ and about sin and forgiveness because he finds comfort in what man must do to be saved.

With some of their questions, some in the audience evidenced that they felt that dishonesty. Somehow, they sensed that they were being swindled. Something did not add up. There was no forgiveness in eternity? There was no forgiveness at the cross? If a man does not confess a sin, then he is unforgiven? A man can die unforgiven? So someone asked, "What's the biblical basis for defining forgiveness as primarily a *declaration*? Colossians 2 and Ephesians 1 seem to indicate that forgiveness is at the cross."

Another wanted to know, "We don't receive forgiveness of our sins until we *own* them. What about those sins we don't even know are sins, also sins of omission?"

Still another inquired, "If we have to repent from our sins, *then* we are forgiven; then do we have to repent from future sins, in case we die before that happens? Otherwise, we die in our sins unforgiven?"

Professor Gritters airily brushed these questions aside and beguiled the questioners of their reward, their peace in the cross of Christ, and the forgiveness that he accomplished there for his elect people.

The speech was an example of the Protestant Reformed Churches' current state of inebriation with the doctrine of Man. Throughout the speech Professor Gritters claimed to clear up confusion. He did. He made perfectly clear that the Protestant Reformed Churches are false to the core, having denied the heart of the gospel in the decree of God, the cross of Christ, and the justification of the sinner by faith alone.

I will examine Professor Gritters' false doctrine more closely next time.

—NJL

2 Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 43–44.

3 Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 43.

THE LAW AND GOSPEL DISTINCTION APPLIED TO EDUCATION (2)

How one views the distinction between the law and the gospel will significantly affect one's view of how education ought to function. If one sees no distinction between the law and the gospel, he most likely will employ, simply by default, some type of law model for education. The law is easy to understand. Good results are tied to good performance, and poor results are tied to poor performance. Study hard, and you will earn higher grades. Do this, and you will get that. That is education under the law. It *works*, literally.

The gospel functions quite differently. To be under the gospel is to be under grace, and grace cuts the ties of performance loose from results. Under grace one receives gifts and rewards that one does not at all deserve. The gospel is hard to understand. To the carnal mind, in fact, grace makes no sense at all. How can any school function under such terms as *undeserved rewards* and *unmerited results*? Why would anyone even want to try? It won't work...or will it?

To understand the reason for using a gospel model of education instead of a law model, we need to understand what is going on theologically with the law and the gospel. The apostle Paul instructs us in Romans 8:3 and Galatians 4:9 that the law of God is weak and beggarly. How can Paul use such derogatory adjectives to describe the good and perfect law of God? Because that law does not, cannot, and never was intended to save anyone. There is no grace in the law. There is only grace in the gospel. And grace is power. The law has no such saving power. The law does have power, but it is of an entirely different sort. The law has the power and authority to kill. Disobey God's infinitely holy law in one small jot, and all of the curses of the law will be upon you. And more, you will deserve every one of them. The law has tremendous strength and power. But the law has no power to make alive. It only has power to kill.

The gospel has power to make alive. The gospel is not only good news about Jesus Christ; the gospel *is* Jesus Christ. That is why he is also called the Word. When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), he was telling us where the only source of life is. There is no life apart from Jesus Christ, the Word. And that

is true in every sense. From the original creation of all things (see John 1:3), to the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion and death, to the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns once more, *the* principle of life belongs to Jesus Christ alone. It is his to possess, and it is his to impart. The law administers death. The gospel administers life. Such life happens only in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ.

What does any of this have to do with learning and education? Everything. Learning happens in the context of life, not death. Those who are in the midst of death are not going to be learning very much. Besides the issue of ability, there would be little point to learning. But those who are alive and have the hope of everlasting life in their hearts have every reason to increase in learning and grow in understanding. And since physical life on this earth is in reality nothing more than a continual death, this means that heavenly life will be the focus of a gospel-based education. That is not to deny that learning the knowledge and skills necessary for living and thriving on this earth must be included in education, but it is to acknowledge that there must be more than that to education. We are presently on this earth. We are not presently in heaven. Nevertheless, we belong to heaven, even now. Life on this earth is important, but it is not all-important. Life on this earth will end. Life in heaven will not. Our view of education will reflect that perspective.

In practical terms this means that rules and grades and standards, or the things of the law and the things of this earth, are not thrown out as if they were useless. Students' progress in learning matters, and charting that progress matters. Obedient and orderly behavior matters. The question is, why do these things matter? The law says that they are important because good grades and good behavior will get you somewhere in this life. Do this, and you will get that. That is how everything in this world works...it would seem.

But that is not how the gospel works. The gospel is completely opposed to the whole system of merit, earning, and rewards. The gospel truly is other-worldly, a concept that may seem to have sprung from an alien mind.

“Do this, and you get that” no longer applies. “You get that” regardless of what you do or don’t do. To one steeped in the ways of the law, that concept will seem more than strange. It will be held in suspicion, to the point of derision. How can this kind of grace be just and fair? What incentive will be left to “do this” if you’ve already “got that”? In the end you cannot have both. You are going to function either according to the law or according to the gospel. And that is where the problem lies. One must apply either the law or the gospel to education as well. A choice must be made.

The natural fear of most people will be that no incentives to learn will be left at all if the gospel is chosen as the main mode of education. Why bother to try to memorize a load of facts and struggle to understand how they all fit together? Why bother to follow any classroom rules at all and obey the teacher? One who sees the world only through the lens of the law will inevitably ask such questions. But those questions have answers. Once more, if we examine what is going on theologically between the law and the gospel, the practical implications for how we teach our children will become clear.

Within the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the law of God is not thrown out and discarded but is rather employed within its rightful and intended use.

The law shows us God’s righteous and holy perfections, while also showing us our dreadful misery and failures. Jesus came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. The law of God is good. So it is in education. Rules for life within the school are necessary and good, and so is knowledge of students’ progress in learning. Grades will not be thrown out, but their purpose and function will be seen differently. Grades will be used to measure the success of the teaching, to see what has in fact been taught. How well a student can study for a test does not necessarily tell us all that much about what he or she might have actually learned. To be able to perform well on a test is certainly helpful, but even that cannot be the main goal. Just like the gospel has everything to do with grace and not with works, a gospel-based education has everything to do with understanding, wisdom, praise of God, and privilege, not with mere test grades and outward behavior.

What does all of that look like in real life? The increase of students’ knowledge and understanding; the growth of their characters; and an ability to think, reason, and discern will be the goals. A law-based education might appear on the surface to contribute to those same goals, but the freedom of the student that necessarily involves

his or her ability to think and discern can be of little concern, if not entirely missing. In fact, a lack of critical thinking might be seen as advantageous under a law-based system, where rules are to be obeyed and not questioned. Obedience and performance will be everything. In a gospel-based system, critical thinking and discernment will be everything. Just as the law is there to serve the gospel, theologically speaking, obedience and performance are there to serve the education of thought and thinking. To obey is not the end in itself, as wonderful and necessary as obedience and good behavior may be. The charge of making stocks and blocks is thrown around a lot these days, but this is where the real charge lies: when obedient behavior is everything, a mechanical robot will fit the requirement quite nicely. That is a true stock and block. Rather, within a gospel model of education, freedom of thought will be the goal. Not robotic slaves but free children of God who willingly love and glorify God are the ones who will be growing in their understanding.

To stand beneath the dark blackness and fire of Mount Sinai is to stand beneath a very different mountain than the gloriously shining grace and mercy of Mount Zion (see Heb. 12:18–24). Those two mountains illustrate the difference between the law and the gospel. They also illustrate

the difference between a law-based model for education and a gospel-based model. As Hebrews 12 instructs us, we have come to dwell under the mighty protection of Zion’s righteous hill, not the terrifyingly fearsome thunder of Sinai. In the end no creature survives under Mount Sinai. No one is holy enough. We would all perish.

Sheer obedience and real learning do not necessarily go together. Running a tight ship may look very neat and tidy, but rules will not necessarily keep that ship on course and get it to its destination. Navigating the ocean with all of its variable waves and wind speeds requires more than following a perfectly laid out plan. Survival, in fact, may demand a different path altogether than the originally intended one. Decisions need to be made. Storms happen. Lulls happen. A properly educated captain will be able to deal with such unforeseen circumstances. And that is life on this earth. God has shown us the final destination to which he is bringing us, and our arrival at the shores of that crystal sea is sure. We know where we are going. But what specifically will happen on the way there is not ours to know. That is only ours to discover. And that is what education must prepare us for. The goal (heaven) is a given, but we need much help on our journey there.

Within the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the law of God is not thrown out and discarded but is rather employed within its rightful and intended use.

Just as the Israelites needed to be led through the wilderness into the land of Canaan, learning more and more all along the way, so do we. That is our life. That is the kind of education we need. That kind of education involves freedom of thought and thinking. Obedience to God's law did not get the miserably stiff-necked nation of Israel to Canaan. God's abundant grace and mercy did. Indeed, the Israelites were freed from Egypt's bondage even before they received God's commands engraved in stone. Abraham received the gospel of the covenant promise from God in Genesis 15 four hundred and thirty years before his astoundingly multiplied posterity knew anything about Sinai and the law of God (see Gal. 3:17). The order of both of these events is significant. The gospel is always first. And the gospel involves freedom.

Note that the freedom of thought that will be encouraged in a gospel model of education will not be just any kind of thought and will certainly not be sinful kinds of thinking. True freedom will be found under only one specific heading: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). That means all wisdom and knowledge are to be found in the adoration and ardent love of God. In *that* mind we are truly free. There are no bounds to the love and praise and reverent fear of God. Nor does that fear include any connotation of terror. If some kind of threatening or intimidating fear was meant here, that would accurately describe a law model of education. "Obey or else" is a threat. "Do this to get that" is nothing more than a form of bondage. But there is no threat, no intimidation, and no coercion in true and free fear of the Lord. John instructs us in 1 John 4:18 that perfect love casts out fear (the terror kind of fear). To such perfect love, there is no constraint.

Also, from a purely practical point of view, freedom must be the hallmark of a gospel-based education. Both critical and creative thinking are essential to education, and both of those happen within the realm of freedom. Note that creative thinking may not be separated from critical thinking at this point. Critical thinking, in fact, cannot happen without creative thinking. They go together. They must go together. One can neither find the problem nor begin to solve it without some measure of creativity operating in both of those quests. In contrast, and strictly speaking, under the law one is simply told what to think, say, and do. There need be no creativity

or freedom involved in that. The problems have already been solved for you. All you need to do is agree to the answers and remember them.

This explains why under the hierarchy of communism, freedom of thought is not encouraged, and artistic expression is not appreciated. Those who advance will be the ones who go along with whatever they are told by those in authority. Conformity is applauded, not free thinking, creativity, or criticism.

Perhaps the picture is becoming clearer. The point is that all of this applies to one's idea of what constitutes a healthy, God-glorifying, covenantal, and Reformed education. The law will have its place. Learning is not going to progress very well under an umbrella of lawless chaos. Continuity, consistency, and order must be part of an educational environment. Having a set of rules and some type of law in operation will be necessary in that

regard. But we may never stop there. The law serves the gospel—but the gospel never serves the law. Law and order set the stage for learning, but law and order do not constitute learning. Genuine understanding happens only within the freedom that a gospel model of education offers. There must be freedom to grow, to question, to ponder, to wonder, and to praise God in all of that. If no questions are asked, no answers will be sought, and then...none will be found, either. The gospel

allows for both the questions and their answers. Both are needed for growth. The law only has commands.

What exactly does this difference look like in the classroom? There is one more use of the law, and perhaps that will explain this best. First, the law shows us our sin and misery, to our great sorrow and shame. Second, the law shows us the righteous and holy perfections of God, to the praise of his holy name. And third, in the face of the gospel, the law's commands show us exactly how to thank God for all that he is and has done for us. That is what we want to do above all else. God put that law in our hearts. The law still represents our misery because we never obey it perfectly in this life, as we sincerely desire to do; nevertheless, it is our great joy and privilege to endeavor to obey it. Obedience to God's law is no bondage and no drudgery. It is pure gift and privilege.

The law may be very difficult to obey; but difficulty, privilege, and joy can all go together. The law was not easy for our Lord to obey at Golgotha. He sweat great drops of blood at Gethsemane over the thought of obeying it.

The infinitely difficult and perfect obedience to God's law that Jesus accomplished throughout his whole life and especially on the cross paved the way for our never-ending joyful and thankful obedience now and into eternity.

But the infinitely difficult and perfect obedience to God's law that Jesus accomplished throughout his whole life and especially on the cross paved the way for our never-ending joyful and thankful obedience now and into eternity. Something of that joyful gratitude will be reflected in the classroom. It will be shining through the atmosphere. Even in all of the trials, struggles, and heartbreaks that inevitably go along with the maturing process at every age, a certain happiness will be enduring. There will be an underlying gratitude. Rules still must be obeyed, order still must be kept, and discipline still must be administered, but fear of punishment will not be the incentive. Rather, for obedience to be real obedience (which is love), it must spring exclusively out of gratitude. That is the difference, and that difference is great. Like tiny chicks hiding beneath their mother's protective wings, the students know they are kept safe under the gospel's mighty and all-comforting truths as well. Love and gratitude go together. Always.

Another difference under a gospel model for education will be the presence of an overt expectation of heaven. It may be argued that even under the law's influence, heaven is not denied. That is true. But under the law heaven is not expected. Under the law children are seen as little vipers. Under the gospel children are seen as little citizens of heaven. Citizens of heaven are going to be treated differently than vipers. Not that these little citizens never act like vipers, and not that their sins are going to be denied or ignored. These little citizens of heaven are, indeed, still sinners on this earth. But they are not vipers. Their expectation is heaven. Heaven or hell is not held as a question over their heads. Such a question may be asked later in life, when in maturity a wayward son or daughter exhibits evidence that makes the question undeniable; but as little children, there is some measure of foolishness that is bound up in all of their hearts. Scripture says so in Proverbs 22:15. Adults know so from their own experiences. Under the gospel the expectation of heaven is still there, even in the face of great sin. All of our sins are great. The activity of faith that the Holy Spirit creates in our hearts looks not at those sinful things that are seen but at those heavenly things that are not seen. Part of the knowledge and confidence of faith for us is that heaven is to an extent

a reality in our lives already now. In the day of Christ's return, heaven will be our reality in full. That kind of knowledge and confidence will be reflected in the classroom. That will determine what is important to teach and what is not. That will also determine our attitude toward what is taught. All of it will be seen in the light of heaven. And that light is bright and clear. That light will affect every subject that is taught. Life, and therefore education too, is not all about this earth. We are merely on an arduous journey in the wilderness here, traveling somewhere else.

And that "somewhere else" is certain. That needs to be emphasized as well. That is more than an intellectually-known fact. When we say that our expectation is heaven, we mean that that expectation is absolutely sure. We can stake our lives on it. We can order our days by it. For creatures of dust, that may be hard to grasp. The word on our present dust-encrusted street is that nothing is certain in this life except death and taxes. There is some truth to that. That is our wilderness. But that is not all there is. Much more is going on. Much, much more.

Count the stars, Abram (see Gen. 15:5). And do you know when the hinds calve, Job? Did you appoint the months of their birth? Did you design the exquisitely-ordered patterns on a peacock's feathers? Did you set the bounds of the seas, with all their swelling tides and retreating pools (see Job 39:1–2, 13; 38:8–11)? Those are the things that a gospel-based education will begin to ponder. And why is that? Why look into the deep and beautiful things of this creation? Because those things reveal the power and majesty and glory of God, the God who is our God and who will surely take us to heaven to live with him forever and ever—just as surely as he knows the number of the stars and brings the hinds to calve in their appointed seasons. He is God.

In that mindset we teach our children. Not because we are better than they are or because we are smarter. All we are is a little more experienced, being placed on a slightly different timeline by God as we journey through this wilderness together with them. It is a journey to a destination that is sure and certain for all of God's little citizens of heaven, young and old.

—Connie L. Meyer

PARALYZED IN THE PRC

The theme of this present article reflects on the terrible spiritual state that faces many of our sympathizers and friends still in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). This spiritual condition is one of paralysis. It is the state of being unable to move, of being completely stuck. When we consider this subject, we can call to mind the faces and names of family members, friends, and other loved ones. They say that they agree with the Reformed Protestant truth, but their church membership says otherwise. As time, like an ever-rolling stream, flows on, the threat that confronts these brothers and sisters is that they become paralyzed in the PRC.

In the dead of winter 2021, an Act of Separation was issued in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. That generation was the result of over half a century of slow apostasy from the truth, so that when the truth came in all its force, wicked men in the Protestant Reformed Churches condemned the truth and those who witnessed thereof. When that separation occurred, there were a variety of reactions. Some people were outright offended. Some rode the fence. Some doubted. Many were enraged with hatred. Each man and woman was confronted with the gospel, especially in its negative presentation in connection with the sin of God's people and their calling to come out of a denomination that had in principle become the whore of Babylon. And the question, the inescapable question, was, "What is the truth, and where must my church membership be?"

There were those who knew that they should join the newly formed Reformed Protestant Churches when the split occurred. Even their own consciences convinced them. The marks of the true church were corrupted in the PRC for all to see. The marks of the false church were clearly manifested. But they did not act. And they still have not moved.

Christ created division in the home. Husband and wife divided. Children against parents and parents against children. A great many considered their families to be most important, more important than church membership. Sad indeed is the state of those who, while they see the corruption of the Protestant Reformed Churches, languish Sunday to Sunday under a false gospel, observe the tide of apostasy and generational rot, and continue

to register their membership in such churches. These are those who face being paralyzed in the PRC.

What is the thinking behind this paralysis? The thought processes follow these lines: "I can't leave my husband/wife/children behind, for to do so would be unloving." "The PRC is bad but not past reform." "Although there were some bad things said and done recently in the PRC, there are still godly people there." "Reformation takes place within the church, not outside it." "Perhaps if I stay in the PRC, I can win over my husband/wife/child." "If I leave my husband/wife/child, they will never come to the truth but will resent me." "Leaving would cause disharmony in my marriage." "I don't like what I am hearing in the PRC, and I like what I hear from the Reformed Protestant Churches, but I would never go there because they are full of angry people." "If only there was a church in between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed Protestant Churches." All of these thoughts and rationalizations amount to one thing: unbelief. What these thoughts tend to is the justification of one's own conscience before God. But they do not hold water or stand the test of scripture.

Here is the plumb line of God's word: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Gen 3:15). The doctrine of the antithesis, right in the midst of believers and their seed, manifested in the line of continued generations, reveals a corrupt stock, which has warfare according to God's decree against the pure offspring of the woman's seed. This enmity was expressed by Christ when he said,

34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.
35. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.
36. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.
37. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

39. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matt. 10:34–39)

To stay in the PRC and in the end to be completely paralyzed is to find one's life. Shortly after the recent split, a young and once noble minister in the PRC was admonished to stop running, turn around, and die for the sake of the gospel. He was told that if he ran away and would not fight, he would never be able to stop running. The same word of admonition applies to the figure of paralysis. Lose your life, therein to find life; or save your life, therein to lose life.

Article 7 of the Belgic Confession says that “the truth is above all” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 28). For the believer his church membership is one of utmost seriousness. Christ, through the mouth of his prophet, said,

5. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.
6. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. (Ps. 137:5–6)

Zeal for the house of God consumed Christ. Such zeal is also the zeal of God's people in connection with their church membership. So much so that they pronounce judgment upon themselves were they to forget the church or desire anything else than communion in her midst. Based upon that scripture, Guido de Brés could write,

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation, that no person, of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them.

And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church, and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God hath established it, even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it, yea,

though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God. (Belgic Confession 28, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 60–61)

Do not gloss over this language because you have heard it a thousand times. The Reformed believer has a certain confession here. Agreeing with the Belgic Confession, he gladly submits to its every word. Did you hear what the Confession said? That outside that true instituted church there is no salvation? That your sacred duty is to join yourself to it? Also that when the church apostatizes there must be an act of separation? That it does not matter where you live but that you must join yourself thereto “wheresoever God hath established it”? That it matters not whether your church, spouse, child, family member, friend, or government opposes it but that even the threat of death does not free you of your calling to be a confessing member in a true church?

Homer C. Hoeksema (HCH) drove the gravity of this home when he wrote,

For remember: the church needs *Christ!* It is only in living connection with that Christ that the church is the church, and that the members possess the life of Christ. And the only contact which we have with Christ as long as we are in this present world is through *His* Word (not man's word), through *His* sacraments, and through *His* government and discipline. Where these are missing, Christ is missing. Where they are corrupted and to the extent that they are corrupted, there I am being separated from contact with Christ my head! This is the life-and-death seriousness of this entire question of the marks of the true church!¹

Hoeksema rightly made a connection between our lively membership in a true church and our very lives in Christ. The two stand or fall together. We have contact with Christ through his word, his sacraments, and his government *in the church* and *only* in the church. And do not forget, when those marks are corrupted, you are being separated from Christ!

There is another word of admonition from the late church father HCH to those who think that they must stay in a church and protest until the cows come home. This word ought to be addressed to those in the PRC who are ensnared with this futile and soul-destroying approach.

1 Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Marks of the True Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Evangelism Committee of the First Protestant Reformed Church, 1984), 16–17.

Moreover, if protest fails, and the carnal element begins to dominate in a church, and the institute will not listen, his calling is not to protest endlessly and at the same time to bemoan his frustrations of protest. In such a case his duty of reformation means, in obedience to the will of God, that he must separate and institute the church anew if necessary.²

In this light all of the rationalizations of the carnal mind must fall away. The believer who is tempted to think after the flesh must set his heart upon scripture and the Belgic Confession. There, and there only, will he find solid ground and sound principles upon which to live.

One final word from HCH, who wrote these things not only for the PRC of his day but also for us who are alive this day:

This is a very painful and also a very serious matter, a step which may not be taken for any carnal consideration. But for Christ's sake, for the truth's sake, for the love of Zion's sake, if he prefers Jerusalem above his chief joy, he will do it. He will refuse to promote the false church, and he will seek and join himself to the true.³

I wish to conclude with a word of warning. The Lord Jesus, through the psalmist, spoke in Psalm 95: "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart" (vv. 7–8). In the midst of the PRC yet today, there are those who do not believe her doctrine. They rather confess the Reformed Protestant truth that God is all and man is nothing. And yet they, for whatever carnal reason, maintain their membership in the PRC. God's word to them is this: "If ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." You indeed have heard his voice, the living voice of God, which speaks of himself as the overflowing fountain of all good, as the one who has accomplished salvation for his people and in his people without any will or works of theirs. Yea, that he is first, and his activity always comes before ours. That our life of obedience is the fruit of his work and not the way unto his communion. Yea, that all things are of God, who fills all in all. The very truth that God is God! Have you heard that voice? Harden not your heart! While it is yet today, do not permit your carnal mind to dominate your will. Harden not your heart, lest God also harden it so that it may forever be hard and you become completely paralyzed in the PRC.

—Elijah Roberts

CONTRIBUTION

JUSTIFIED WHEN WE BELIEVE?

Introduction

A good theologian must rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), that is, he must uncover the Spirit's meaning in the text. The truth is from the God of truth concerning Jesus Christ, who is the truth, and the Spirit leads the church into all truth (John 16:13). A minister of the gospel rightly divides the word to give the true sense of the text. He opens up that word to uncover the deep mysteries of God. He cuts open that word to point out the

truth of that word to his flock that they may eat the meat cut up for them. The faithful minister brings that meat to his congregation on Sunday when the gospel, which declares to them salvation in Jesus Christ, is preached. The faithful preaching makes man nothing and fills him with Christ. Emptied of himself, he is hungry for Christ.

What Rev. Martyn McGeown proposes in his recent *Standard Bearer* article is a novel idea of 2 Timothy 2:15 in service of the false doctrine that continues to ooze out

² Hoeksema, *The Marks of the True Church*, 23.

³ Hoeksema, *The Marks of the True Church*, 23.

of every pore of his being.¹ For him, to “rightly [divide] the word of truth” is to “make proper distinctions.” This is the primer for what he is about to do with the word of God and the confessions. He is not about to “rightly [divide]” the word. Instead, he is about to mangle that word, rend it into pieces, and then spoon-feed it to his audience, who will nod their heads in agreement, *oohing* and *ahhing*.

In his article Reverend McGeown does a really great job of finding man. He ranks among the top in this regard. He pays lip service to the doctrines of God’s sovereignty, election, and justification by faith alone. But those are just the terms he knows he needs to sprinkle in here and there to sound Reformed. His theology is a theology of endless distinctions regarding justification for the purpose of inserting man and his believing and confessing.

Reverend McGeown is not Reformed in his doctrine. I wonder in amazement that his audience actually believes what he writes. He would like his audience to believe—and the people mostly do—that the state of justification is different than the experience of justification and that justification is also different than the forgiveness of sins. It is true that there are different aspects of justification: justification in eternity, justification at the cross, the assurance of justification in Christ’s resurrection, and justification declared in the gospel; but none of the aspects of justification, including being imputed the righteousness of Christ, are given to us “when we believe.” We receive the righteousness of Christ by faith alone, not as a ground but as the means whereby we are ingrafted into him and become partakers of him and all his benefits.²

What Reverend McGeown has been laboring through his writings to prove is that faith and its activity of believing are the *basis* for justification instead of faith simply being the *means*. This was the work of the Arminians against the Reformed at the Synod of Dort as well. It is the effort of Reverend McGeown to overthrow gracious salvation and the gracious preaching of salvation with the teaching that man receives justification when he believes. Man’s legal status changes when he believes. Justification becomes dependent on a man’s believing or not believing. Reverend McGeown never uses the word *condition*, but his theology is one of conditions. He has shown himself

His theology is a theology of endless distinctions regarding justification for the purpose of inserting man and his believing and confessing.

to be an enemy of gracious justification and of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this was all written in an issue of the *Standard Bearer* that was supposed to be about justification by faith alone.

The theology of Reverend McGeown is lethal and poisonous. For Reverend McGeown you are not justified by faith alone, but you are justified when you believe. My question to Reverend McGeown is, why are you changing what the church has confessed since the Reformation, that is, *sola fide*, faith alone—that God justifies the ungodly by faith alone? The answer should be clear to the discerning reader holding the word of God. McGeown’s theology sends men and women to their working and specifically to their *believing*. It is the theology of Man.

Reverend McGeown’s article is a grief to me because of how weak he makes God, how weak he makes God’s sovereignty, and how weak he makes the preaching of the gospel and because of the great number of friends and loved ones who have been caused to stumble by this siren song. The burden of this article will be to strike at the doctrine of Reverend McGeown’s article, God upholding me by his grace and Spirit. It will be to rightly divide the word of truth in laying out the light of the truth of God’s word against the dark background of false doctrine.

Faith Is the Fruit of Election

Reverend McGeown begins his work by attempting to exegete Acts 13:38–39, 48. He attempts to prove with these verses that when the men of Antioch believed, they were justified. He writes,

When the men of Antioch, who were “ordained to eternal life” according to verse 48, believed, they were justified. Their legal status changed. They had been under condemnation. Then they were justified.

This is the theology of Reverend McGeown: when they believed, *then* they were justified. First man does his believing, then man receives forgiveness of sins. But all Reverend McGeown does here is manufacture a condition for salvation out of his own mind and will. The men of Antioch had to do something, namely, believe; *then* they received justification.

1 Martyn McGeown, “Justified When We Believe,” *Standard Bearer* 99, no. 4 (November 15, 2022): 90–92. Subsequent quotations of Reverend McGeown are from this article.

2 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:97.

By using the word “when,” Reverend McGeown is introducing an aspect of time into justification, which is a legal act of God whereby he declares the sinner righteous.³ *When* the men of Antioch believed, then they were justified. This is contrary to the Reformed faith and the doctrine taught by Rev. Herman Hoeksema: “The elect do not become righteous before God in time by faith, but they are righteous in the tribunal of God from before the foundation of the earth.”⁴

Reverend McGeown completely divorces God’s decree of election from God’s gift of faith. Acts 13:38–39, 48 do not teach man’s activity of believing or his working for justification. The important phrase in Acts 13:48 is “as many as were ordained to eternal life.” Reverend McGeown is fond of breaking down words for his audience, so let us do the same. The word “ordained” is in the perfect tense, quite remarkably. When a word is in the perfect tense, it refers to a past action that is being manifested in the present. This word “ordained” is also in the passive voice, meaning that those who were ordained were being acted upon by an outside agent or force. What then is the doctrine of this important word “ordained”? It is this: God is the agent. His decree of election is strictly his work alone. And the elect, “as many as were ordained,” are the objects of God’s gracious work. Their believing is the fruit of God’s election of them. Acts 13:48 is the outstanding text in the New Testament of sovereign predestination and of God’s election of some to eternal life.

How does God manifest his decree to the elect who were ordained to eternal life? When the gospel comes to them, as many as were ordained to eternal life infallibly and irresistibly believe because God is the almighty God, and nothing can so much as move without his willing it (Matt. 10:29).

Reverend McGeown disparages the preaching of eternal justification by saying, “Paul did not preach, ‘You were justified in eternity, and through faith you simply come to the conscious realization of that eternal reality.’” However, this is exactly the truth of Acts 13:48 in connection with Acts 13:38–39. “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (v. 38). The preaching of Paul made known to God’s elect the forgiveness of sins that belonged to them in Jesus Christ. The preaching made known to them God’s sovereign election of them and that they were justified in eternity.

This is the teaching of question 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism: “Whence knowest thou this?,” that is, how

do you come to the knowledge (consciousness) of Jesus Christ and all that he has accomplished as mediator of the covenant? The answer of the Catechism: “From the holy gospel” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 89). That is how you know and come to the consciousness of your salvation in Christ. That is how you know that your sins are forgiven and that you have the everlasting righteousness of Christ.

John Calvin taught the same truth:

For he doth not begin to choose us after that we believe; but he sealeth his adoption, which was hidden in our hearts, by the gift of faith, that it may be manifest and sure... Whence we do also gather what force the preaching of the gospel hath of itself. For it doth not find faith in men, save only because God doth call those inwardly whom he hath chosen, and because he draweth those who were his own before unto Christ, (John 6:37).⁵

God draws the elect, who from eternity belonged to Christ their head, by the preaching of the gospel. Paul preached the gospel to the multitude in Antioch. God’s decree of election was the controlling force that determined who believed. Their believing was the fruit of God’s election of those Gentiles. That the Gentiles believed (Acts 13:39, 48) refers to faith, God’s wonderful, gracious gift to his elect people, bestowed by the operation of the Holy Spirit. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Canons 1.5 also teaches this: “Faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through Him is the free gift of God” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 155).

Faith is the bond by which we are engrafted into Christ; the means whereby we are justified; and a fruit, a gracious fruit, of election, apart from any working of man. Faith is

an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that... remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90–91)

Faith is the connection of the elect sinner to Jesus Christ, and faith is the bond that appropriates Christ and all his benefits, including wisdom, justification, sanctification, and redemption. The elect child of God is justified by faith, not when he believes.

3 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:84.

4 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:95.

5 John Calvin, *Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:556.

When election is placed above faith, there is no cause why men should challenge to themselves any thing in any part of their salvation. For if faith, wherein consisteth salvation, which is unto us a witness of the free adoption [justification] of God, which coupleth us to Christ, and maketh his life ours, whereby we possess God with his righteousness, and, finally, whereby we receive the grace of sanctification, be grounded without us in the eternal counsel of God; what good things so ever we have, we must needs acknowledge that we have received it of the grace of God, which doth prevent us of its own accord.⁶

Faith Is a Doing Nothing

Reverend McGeown turns his gaze next upon Acts 16:30, the well-known passage of the Philippian jailor, who cried out, “What must I do to be saved?” Reverend McGeown condemns eternal justification by writing, “The answer was not, ‘You are already saved from eternity and eternally justified, so that God does not see—and never has seen—any sin in you.’” He calls this preaching confusing to an unbeliever. However, to the elect child of God who has been given faith, this is not confusing! The Holy Spirit testifies in his heart by the preaching, “This promise is for me, and I have all these things in Christ—for free!”

Reverend McGeown’s condemnation of eternal justification brazenly contradicts scripture, which teaches, “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel” (Num. 23:21). God looked down upon the elect of Israel and saw no sin. Israel was already justified in God’s eternal decree before Christ had even borne the curse of the cross. Reverend McGeown’s statement also contradicts the teaching of Ephesians 1:4: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” God chose his elect in Christ before the foundation of the world, and they are without blame in eternity. He gave his elect the spotless robes of Jesus Christ freely without *believing* as a work of man.

Reverend McGeown then continues and states,

God’s act of justifying us also includes God’s act of giving us the experience of justification.

Justification would happen after the jailor’s believing. Paul could not preach eternal justification to the Philippian jailor because, until the wretched man believed, neither he nor the apostle could know that he was an elect person.

The gospel must be preached promiscuously throughout the world. It is preached for the elect, and the promise is efficacious for them only, yet the gospel must be proclaimed to everyone. I will come back to this thought briefly in connection with Reverend McGeown’s understanding of preaching and missions.

This exegesis of the text by Reverend McGeown is the wholesale abandonment of the doctrine of Rev. Herman Hoeksema on this exact text. In a sermon on Acts 16:30–31, Reverend Hoeksema preached the following:

He cried out, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And that same Christ preached to him, “This you must do: believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” That means, beloved, you must do nothing. Believe. Believe. Nothing. Do nothing but believe, believe, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.⁷

Why could Reverend Hoeksema say this? Because Reverend Hoeksema properly defined faith, which is nothing of man but all of

God: “You must remember that all faith is faith in God. All faith is faith in God. Faith can never be faith in man. Faith must always be faith in God.”⁸

Later in his article Reverend McGeown makes plain that faith is something man does: “This act of faith, which is God’s gift (Phil. 1:29), is repeated throughout our lifetime, every time we consciously lay hold of Jesus Christ by faith, so that, having heard and received the gospel by faith we [go] down to [our] house justified.” This is sneaky and deceptive theology because he says some right things that strike the Reformed ear as true. Faith is God’s gift—this is true. We hear the gospel by faith—this is also true. But the doctrine of this statement is nothing but bare Arminianism. Man must consciously lay hold of Jesus Christ by man’s act of faith. Saying that faith is God’s gift does not save this statement. Neither does a passing mention of the gospel save his doctrine. Faith is something man is doing to receive something from God, namely justification.

Throughout his article Reverend McGeown searches

6 Calvin, *Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles*, 1:557.

7 Herman Hoeksema, “The Calling of the Philippian Jailor,” sermon preached in Hull, Iowa, on July 5, 1953, https://oldpathsrecordings.com/wp-content/uploads/sermons/2020/09/04-The-Calling-of-the-Philippian-Jailer-7_5_53.mp3.

8 Hoeksema, “The Calling of the Philippian Jailor.”

high and low in the confessions to find support for his theology. He exerts himself in mental gymnastics to find Man in the confessions. Man must *believe*. Man must *grasp* or *lay hold of*. Man must *embrace*. If man does these things, then according to Reverend McGeown, “our sins are forgiven—or we are justified—repeatedly by *believing* the promise of the gospel” (emphasis added). But the point of faith is not man’s believing; the point of faith is Jesus Christ. No one denies that faith has activities. Faith believes, rests, clings, embraces, and relies on the promise of God. Faith looks to nothing else but Jesus Christ. However, faith is the *means*, not the *basis*, that appropriates Jesus Christ and all his righteousness. Reverend McGeown shows himself to be among the enemies of gracious justification, condemned by the Protestant Reformed Churches of old, who teach that “the activity of believing becomes the sinner’s righteousness with God, rather than the obedience of Christ that faith only embraces and receives.”⁹

Faith and its activity of believing are a doing nothing. This is in complete harmony with scripture and the confessions. Question and answer 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains what true faith is: “True faith is...a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90). Belgic Confession 22: “The Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 49). Canons 1.4 on divine predestination: “Such as receive it [the gospel], and embrace Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith...” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 155). What must you do to saved? Do nothing, beloved. Believe! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Rest in Jesus Christ. Embrace Jesus Christ. Hold to Jesus Christ. Trust in Jesus Christ. Faith is not man’s working, man’s obedience, or man’s *believing*.

Justified in Our Experience

Reverend McGeown in his mangling of the scripture writes, “Therefore, to be justified you must believe in Jesus.” We have heard this theology before in the *Standard Bearer*: “If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.”¹⁰ Man must believe. Reverend McGeown is the new Reverend Koole and makes the theology of Reverend Koole his own. He makes believing man’s work in order to be justified or to experience justification.

I have spent much time explaining faith as a fruit of

election and faith as a doing nothing. The resounding answer of scripture and the Reformed confessions is that a man is justified by faith alone without works. Justification is God’s act whereby he “without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ” (Heidelberg Catechism, A 60, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 106).

God’s act of justifying us also includes God’s act of giving us the experience of justification. The holy gospel, according to God’s sovereign decree, gathers the elect of God and declares to them remission of sins and everlasting righteousness. The gospel, worked by the Holy Spirit, testifies to the elect that they are justified not only objectively but subjectively in their conscious experience. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. An elect child of God experiences peace in his whole being. He knows and tastes that peace in his mind and will. Romans 5:11 says that we have joy in God. Being justified by faith, we have true happiness and bliss as members of the body of Christ. In Romans 8:32 the Spirit says that we are freely given *all* things. There is nothing man must do to have all of salvation, including the conscious experience of that salvation. Christ accomplished it all on the cross when he said, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

God’s decree of election makes all of the salvation we have in Christ so certain that it can never be taken away. As Professor Engelsma formerly taught,

It [election] is assuring as the fountain of justification. It lives in the believing sinner’s consciousness that he is righteous before God by faith, not because he performed the condition of believing and certainly not because he performs good works, but because God eternally chose him in love.¹¹

God’s decree of election is the sure foundation that can never be shaken.

Reverend McGeown steals away from the people of God all the comfort of the gospel. Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks and answers,

What is thy only *comfort* in life and death?

That I...belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins...and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life.

9 David J. Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017), 325.

10 Kenneth Koole, “What Must I Do...?,” *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 7–8.

11 Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification*, 473.

(*Confessions and Church Order*, 83–84; emphasis added)

The authors of the Catechism used the word “comfort.” *Comfort* is an experience word, just like the word “peace” in Romans 5:1 and “joy” in Romans 5:11. Reverend McGeown makes believing to be an activity of man that man must do so that his conscious enjoyment of justification does not “fluctuate” or “be lost if we walk impenitently in our sins.” He contradicts Lord’s Day 12, which teaches that Christ “defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation He has purchased for us” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 96). This is comfort, joy, happiness, and peace: Jesus Christ did it all, and you have him as your covenant head apart from your working or merits. An elect child of God is justified by faith alone.

The Gospel and Missions

Reverend McGeown then attacks the sovereignty of God by the well-worn tactic that

a preacher on the mission field may not declare to someone who does not yet believe, “God sees no sin in you; in fact, you have always been saved and all of your sins have been eternally forgiven without faith and without repentance.”

This is similar to his previous statement regarding the Philippian jailor: “The answer was not, ‘You are already saved from eternity and eternally justified, so that God does not see—and never has seen—any sin in you.’” His reasoning behind this is that if you cannot call those hearing the preaching to man’s work of believing, then how can a church do missions? Reverend McGeown hurls the same slander as the Remonstrants did against the Synod of Dordt. He completely unmoors the effectual gospel calling from God’s gracious decree of election.

In Matthew 28:19 Christ commanded his church to preach the gospel promiscuously: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” There is a serious calling to the church to do mission work. She must preach the gospel to all men and declare the call of the gospel to repent and believe. Canons 2.5 states,

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

to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 163)

Reverend McGeown would like to make the call of the gospel conditioned on or dependent on man’s believing the promise. However, the call of the gospel is not an offer to man that is dependent or conditioned on believing or on an act of obedience to God. The gospel is a promise, and it is an effectual promise. The gospel promise was first revealed in Genesis 3:15. This promise is the promise of what God will do according to his sovereign good pleasure (Canons 1.7, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 156). God’s promise is his divine word. His word is the power to bring itself to pass. The promise is Christ.¹² By the gospel God infallibly and irresistibly manifests the elect and bestows upon them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). He effectually redeems those who were from eternity chosen to salvation and confers upon them faith (Canons 2.8, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 163–64). In the gospel is the calling of elect sinners to Jesus Christ, as Canons 3–4.8 teaches: “As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168). Canons 3–4.10 states about the response to the call of the gospel: “It must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168). God calls his people in the gospel and confers upon them by the Holy Spirit faith and repentance, and they believe the promise.

God’s decree of election controls who believes the promise of God: “As many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). The elect who are called to eternal life believe. God calls his people to himself by the power of the gospel promise. They are infallibly called by God, and they believe the promise. Canons of Dordt 1, rejection 1 teaches that both faith and its activity of believing are controlled by election.

God will not only save those who will believe, but...He has also from eternity chosen certain particular persons to whom above others He in time will grant both faith in Christ and perseverance, as it is written: *I manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world* (John 17:6). *And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48). (*Confessions and Church Order*, 159)

The Gospel and Repentance

Reverend McGeown, in concluding his ungodly work, states, “The impenitent one incurs a deadly guilt until

12 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:101.

he confesses and forsakes that sin of which he is guilty.” He uses Canons 5.5, 7 as his proof of this. Remember that in Canons 5 we are in the doctrine of the preservation of the saints. For Reverend McGeown we are dealing with the preservation of the saints in the realm of the experience of justification. For him preservation is by man’s confessing or repenting. Man is the one doing the confessing. And if man confesses his sin, *then* he will again have the enjoyment of justification. In Canons 5, error 1, the Synod rejects those “who teach that the perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election, or a gift of God gained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 176). The truth of the preservation or perseverance of the believer is that it is a fruit of election and a gift of God, not a condition that man has to fulfill before his justification.

Reverend McGeown must view God as a weak God and the gospel as a weak gospel. One might say that he is afraid of the gospel. God sovereignly ordained the preaching of the gospel to turn his elect to himself. Canons 5.14: “As it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 176).

The sin of David with Bathsheba is oft pointed to as an example that one does not experience the forgiveness of sins until he confesses the sin he has committed against God, and *then* the enjoyment of his justification returns. But the gospel infallibly and irresistibly bestows faith and repentance upon the elect. In 2 Samuel 12:1 the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to David. And what do prophets do? They speak the word of the Lord that God has given them. They preach the gospel! And this is what Nathan did: he preached to David, and that effectual gospel conferred repentance to David by the Holy Spirit. This is the power of the gospel upon the elect. “David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die” (v. 13).

How did Rev. G. M. Ophoff exegete this text? Like this:

The word “also” has significance here. It points to David’s confession. That was God’s first work in him. The author of it was the Lord. Having done the former, the Lord did also the latter long before the confession had passed this penitent’s lips. For take notice of the tense: “The Lord *bath* forgiven thee.” Nathan knew; for God had told him. And therefore there was no need of the prophet adding: *if* thou truly repentest. For the Lord knows the heart. And He had instructed Nathan. And so the Lord still speaks to the contrite by His word as proclaimed by His prophets and applied to their hearts by Christ’s Spirit: “I forgive thee.” And here He puts the period. And so He cleansed David’s heart from its evil conscience and gave him peace.¹³

God powerfully preserves his elect by the preaching of Christ in his church. The preaching declares to the elect sinner, “The Lord *bath* forgiven thee.” And that is where God puts the period. And because God has put that period there, so also have the Reformed Protestant Churches in their confession of the truth, God upholding them.

God in Jesus Christ has justified his elect; he has given them remission of sins; they are forgiven on the basis of Jesus Christ alone by faith without man’s believing, confessing, works, or merits. God in his mercy sends his prophets to his church to declare this good news of the forgiveness of sins. What is the infallible fruit of the gospel’s being preached? God sovereignly and efficaciously returns his wayward, impenitent people to himself.

Let this be the end of the Protestant Reformed Churches’ claiming to hold the doctrine of Reverend Hoeksema and Reverend Ophoff. The Protestant Reformed Churches hate the doctrine of their forefathers, and by the doctrine that they teach today in their writings and off their pulpits, they show that they hate Jesus Christ. “Ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous...Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets” (Matt. 23:29–31).

—Tyler D. Ophoff

13 G. M. Ophoff, “Thou Art the Man,” *Standard Bearer* 28, no. 15 (May 1, 1952): 353–56.

SUFFERING THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST

Suffering affliction for the sake of Christ is the living reality of the church throughout the entire New Testament age. The church suffers innumerable reproaches and is buffeted on every side by the onslaught of wicked men who seek her life. This hatred and enmity are occasioned by the truth. It is concerning this enmity that Christ said to his disciples, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Therefore, it should come as no surprise to us that we suffer afflictions for the sake of Christ. Even as Christ was hated by the world and nailed to a tree, the church of Christ will also suffer in the midst of the world.

Scripture teaches that the sufferings of the church are that which is left behind of the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24). Thus there is a distinction between the afflictions of Christ, whereby he made satisfaction for our sins to God, and the afflictions that Christ left behind for God’s people. Concerning the afflictions by which Christ accomplished our salvation, they are finished; there are no afflictions of the suffering of Jesus Christ that are left behind. Those afflictions belonged to Christ’s state of humiliation, in which he became accursed of God and by which Christ brought an end to our sin-lives. Jesus Christ became sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21). Those afflictions Christ bore all his life long, beginning with his lowly birth in Bethlehem, as he was made under the law and bore the curse of God as the sin-bearer for all God’s people.

Those afflictions had as their heart the cross of Calvary. At the cross the curse of God came to a head, especially during the three hours of darkness. The curse of God brought Christ down to the very depths of hell at the cross. It was at the cross that Christ drank down the cup of God’s wrath, which was due to us for our sins. The sufferings that Christ endured there were finished when Jesus cried out, “It is finished.” No one else could suffer as Christ suffered for sin. For Christ was a real, righteous man without original guilt. Also, Christ was very God and was able by his divinity to sustain the great burden of God’s wrath that he suffered against sin. At the cross Christ perfectly made satisfaction unto God on account of our sins.

The afflictions that the church suffers are Christ’s reproaches. The reproaches of Christ were present from the moment of his birth. There was no room in the inn, Herod sought to kill him, and the people whom he came to save were generally uninterested in him. Those reproaches went with Christ throughout all his earthly ministry. They intensified and became most despicable at the cross. The church, as she is joined to Christ by faith and believes upon Christ in the world, suffers innumerable reproaches for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Contrary to outward appearances, the church is given an occasion for rejoicing in the midst of her afflictions. This can only be seen with the eyes of faith. First, the church is comforted that there is a definite end to her sufferings. That which is left behind of the afflictions of Christ is a measure that must be filled. The church is comforted that after she has suffered for a little while, Christ will receive her unto himself in heaven (1 Pet. 5:10). Second, the church is comforted that she suffers her afflictions not for her own sake, for then she would only have reason to fear and despair. Rather, her sufferings are the sufferings of her Lord and savior. Finally, the church is comforted in that her sufferings work for her a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

The church confesses the great honor that is hers to suffer with Christ. To say that the church rejoices in affliction for the sake of affliction is false. Rather, the sufferings of the church in the afflictions of this life for the sake of Christ are evidences of the presence of Christ in the midst of her. The church suffers in the world and is hated by all according as the world hated Christ first. Because Christ is in her midst by his word and Spirit, the world rages against the church and despises her.

These afflictions that Christ left behind for his church are the reproaches of former friends who despise God’s people for the sake of the truth. These afflictions are the reproaches of loved ones with whom God’s people seemed to agree at one time but who have since turned their backs on the truth. These afflictions take the form of hateful words, sneering glances, slanderous texts and emails, public and private defamation, and schism within the church of Christ.

These afflictions are not borne by a select few, for all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted. Rather, these sufferings are continually borne by the church throughout the whole earth until the Lord comes again. In accordance with this truth, scripture exhorts the church to resist the assaults of the devil in faith, “knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:9). This truth is comfort for the church. There is no new suffering. All share in the afflictions that Christ left behind. By means of the other members of the church, the child of God is encouraged to continue steadfastly in faith in the midst of afflictions by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Having this mind, which was also in Christ Jesus, the church suffers together. As members together of the same body, the church endeavors to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This also teaches that whenever someone in the church refuses to suffer with the other members of the church, he or she attacks the unity of that church. Such a refusal is damaging and disrupts the fellowship of the congregation for the sake of selfish and carnal motives. The chief concern of the church must be to have the mind of Christ. Having the mind of Christ, the church suffers as a body in the midst of this world by virtue of Christ’s suffering for her sins. On the basis of that suffering of Christ, God established his covenant with his people. Because of the afflictions of Christ, which he suffered for their sins, God brings all his people into one body in Christ and gathers his church throughout the whole world by the preaching of the gospel.

At no point in time is a member of the church to rejoice over the suffering of another member. This would be cruel and unloving. Rather, the church suffers together by bearing one another’s burdens. That activity of the members for one another is part of what it means to walk in the way of love. It is to have the mind that was also in Christ Jesus, according to which Christ became a man and took upon himself the form of a servant. Jesus Christ came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Likewise, the members suffer together and encourage one another in their sufferings along their earthly pilgrimages. Members encourage and comfort one another in their sufferings not in themselves but in the Lord, whose will it is for them to be brought unto heavenly glory in the way of suffering.

A refusal to suffer with the other members of the congregation is hateful and shows a general lack of care for

the covenant and kingdom of God. That refusal denies the Christ through whom we are brought together into that covenant and kingdom. The truth concerning those members who refuse to suffer with the other members is that they care little for the name of Christ and are no different than those who passed by him in his sufferings and despised him. Even worse, they are like those who ridiculed him in his sufferings.

This refusal to suffer with the other members of the church still happens in the church today. It can be clearly seen. It not only exists in the church, but it also has extremely harmful consequences upon the hearts and souls of those who are suffering for Christ’s sake and would bring them perilously close to despair if it were not for the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Refusal to suffer affliction is not love and does not arise out of faith. Refusal to suffer is hatred and arises out of unbelief. This refusal has taken many forms, a few of which have become increasingly common among us.

First, and perhaps the most common refusal among us, is this: “I can sympathize with your suffering the loss of spouse, friends, loved ones, sons and daughters, and many other things for the truth’s sake. However, I am not going to be the one who stops fellowshiping

with my family. My family will have to do that to me first.” Or “My family will have to cut me off.” This is simply nothing less than a refusal to suffer the afflictions of Christ with the other members who suffer. Even worse, it is a mockery of their sufferings.

When members suffer the loss of family and friends for the sake of the truth and bend their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, this is not something to be despised. Whether it is right or wrong to continue fellowshiping with those who are not one in the faith with us is not even a question. It is not a topic that needs further discussion. It is the very clear and explicit teaching of scripture. Their fruits have shown exactly what is in their hearts.

Being content to stay in a denomination that spits upon the very notion that God is everything in salvation is not undiscernible fruit. All the earmarks of unbelief are present, yet many of us continue fellowshiping with our families and friends and cleave to our earthly ties despite every sign that God has given us to stop. Continuing in such fellowship is a denial of Christ for the sake of earthly peace and stability. And what about the members who actually suffer the loss of earthly ties? They are left to bear their afflictions alone. When suffering members receive the encouragement of other

The members suffer together and encourage one another in their sufferings along their earthly pilgrimages.

members who refuse to suffer with them, it is received as half-hearted. The blood of suffering members cries from the ground, but many block their ears to those cries. And for what? Because they will not suffer with those members, choosing rather to fellowship with the unbelieving and impenitent. The warning to us is that such a refusal is not merely a mockery of the other members in their afflictions but also a mockery of Christ himself, whose afflictions they bear.

Second, another example of such refusal to suffer with the other members of the church is the refusal to participate in doctrinal controversy. Those who refuse to participate in doctrinal controversy are often afraid of the consequences of that controversy. They are often afraid that becoming too involved in doctrinal controversy might entangle them in the crossfire and offend people more than “necessary.” Maybe the people they are afraid to offend are friends and family. There are various appeals made to lessen the blows and cautions given against the language and rhetoric that is used from the pulpit, in order not to offend anybody. This too is a refusal to suffer the afflictions of Christ. Those members who are stirred in their hearts over matters that are crucial to the truth of the gospel and the rejection of the lie are met with an obstacle that sorely affects them. That obstacle is the objectors to doctrinal controversy. We are not to become obstacles in the way of doctrinal controversy, but we are called to labor and fight for the cause of the truth or get out of the way. It is the one who objects to doctrinal controversy whom God will judge.

Third, the refusal to suffer the afflictions of Christ with the other members of the congregation expresses itself in the refusal to stand alongside the other members for the cause of Christian education. This is seen in the refusal to stand in agreement with those who insist, according to the word of God, that the good Christian school is a demand of the covenant. This refusal takes concrete form in various objections to the good Christian school. Some say the demand for a Christian school is a form of legalism, while others insist upon the necessity of a passage of scripture that explicitly states that the Christian school is a demand of the covenant. Whatever the case, the calling is either to labor for the cause of Christian education or to get out of the way.

We are not to stand in the way of the other members of the congregation who desire the good Christian school. The good Christian school is not an option; it is a demand of the covenant. Concerning that truth, all the major questions and objections have been answered sufficiently. Suffer with the other members. Suffer as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. We must insist that we have

good Christian schools and that if such do not exist, we labor to form them, come what may. Insisting upon the necessity of our own schools may cause many to leave the Reformed Protestant Churches. Indeed, that insistence already has. And the church is again comforted that even in these things her reward is far greater than her afflictions. The way of the Lord for her is the way of affliction, the way of splits and divisions in the church. However, it is the Lord’s will that in this way he should bring his church to perfection in heaven.

Such perseverance in suffering is not of our own strength. We do not suffer afflictions as we ought. Oftentimes, we shrink from the very thought of suffering the afflictions of Christ. The truth is that all our sufferings are imperfect. All our afflictions are borne by us as we live within a body of death. This body of death is the explanation for our sins. By nature we are conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins. The comfort of the church in her afflictions is never in herself. The church can and may only comfort herself according as Christ himself suffers and did suffer for her.

Jesus Christ suffered unto death, bearing our sins under the law and being made a curse for us. Now we suffer not as those who are under the law but as those who have been set free in Christ. In Christ we are given the right to suffer with him. Being joined to Christ by faith, that suffering is the inevitable fruit of faith. Those afflictions are the church’s glory as she is united to Jesus Christ her head. When the church suffers, Christ himself also suffers.

The calling of the church with respect to the afflictions that Christ left behind is to suffer with him. Suffer with him! Suffer with each other as members together of one body in Jesus Christ. And be comforted that in all your sufferings you are being saved—not because you suffer but because Christ suffered unto the death of the cross for you. Your sufferings do not gain you anything.

Instead, be comforted in your afflictions that in them you are being saved, brought irresistibly by God through this world as pilgrims and strangers unto the joy of perfection in heaven. In suffering we have no reason to doubt or fear what men can do unto us. Therefore, we are comforted by the word of God in Romans 8.

17. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.
18. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

—Garrett Varner



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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

The portion of Jacob is not like them: for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: The LORD of hosts is his name.—Jeremiah 10:16

A *portion.* It is the Lord's allotment to a man, a woman, or a child. To everyone Jehovah has appointed his portion. It is his piece of time and of the things of the world as that leads to his portion in the world to come, appointed to him in eternity. Oh, yes, one's portion in this life cannot be understood apart from Jehovah's portion appointed to him in the world that is to come. So as Jehovah determined the eternal destinies of men and women, so also according to that eternal purpose, he appoints them their portions in this life.

So the men of the world have their portions in this life. To some God appoints a large portion, and to others he appoints a small portion. To some he gives riches and honor. To others he gives trouble and sorrow. Some receive of God a superabundance of good things. Others are handed a piece of bread sufficient for the day. Some receive long life, and others are cut down in a few days. But Jehovah gives to each his portion for the time in which he labors under the sun. Then, casting men down into destruction, Jehovah appoints them their portion with the hypocrites, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. This is the portion of wicked men from God: the heavens shall reveal their iniquity, and the earth shall rise up against them; the increase of their houses shall depart, and their goods will flow away in the day of God's wrath.

Each man of the world must be satisfied with his portion in this life, for this is all that he receives: to eat, to drink, and to be merry is his lot and afterward to be cast into everlasting darkness. Whether a man receives abundance or he receives poverty, it is a most miserable portion.

And Jehovah has even appointed to himself a portion. The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of God's inheritance. His peculiar possession, his delight, and the joy of his heart is his people, his beloved and elect Jacob! Israel is the rod of God's inheritance!

And to Jacob God gives the most glorious portion: himself. Jacob is his elect church. God appoints himself in all his power and glory, in all his life and beauty, in all his grace and mercy as the portion of Jacob. God is not like the idols of gold and silver on which men rely. He is the former of all things. He is the ruler of all. He appointed all things, even the wicked for the day of evil. God made all things and sovereignly directs them to the end that he appoints. Jehovah of hosts is his name! And appointing himself as Jacob's portion, Jehovah came to redeem his people, Jacob, and gave himself for them and for the salvation of their children at the cross of Christ!

And then, too, they have their portions in this life from Jehovah. Their portions here below—whether sickness or health, fruitful years or barren, riches or poverty—must be subservient to their salvation, for Jehovah of hosts is their portion.

And while men of the world must be satisfied with this life, those who receive Jehovah as their portion will behold his face in righteousness and will be satisfied, when they awake, with his likeness.

—NJL