

The background features a stylized, orange-toned illustration. On the left, a sword is shown in profile, pointing upwards and to the right. On the right, a shield is depicted, partially overlapping the sword's blade. The shield has a circular design with several smaller circles inside. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

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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FINALLY, BRETHERN, FAREWELL!

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



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But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. — 1 Corinthians 1:30–31

God's eternal purpose must be fulfilled. That eternal purpose he expressed in these words: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." God is God. All glory, honor, wisdom, and might are his, also in the matter of salvation. His purpose in salvation is not only the salvation of sinners, but his purpose is also that he be glorified in all his words and works and that he be justified when he judges. God will be glorified. God will be glorified in the salvation of sinners. He will not give his glory to another.

And of him are ye in Christ that the word of God might be fulfilled. He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Of him are ye in Christ.

Union with Christ.

Saving union with Christ.

Eternal union with Christ.

That he who glories might glory in the Lord.

Consider the contrast between saving union with Christ Jesus and damning fellowship with Adam. God joins to Christ those who had condemnation in Adam. God saves nobodies. He creates out of nothing. He always calls the things that are not as though they were (Rom. 4:17). What is true of God's creating is true of God's work in salvation, yet more glorious, for in salvation he raises the dead!

What was true of us spiritually prior to our union with Christ? *We were not!* We were not merely weak, foolish, or despised, but we were nothings and nobodies. We were that because of Adam. He was our head. He represented us, and out of him we are born corrupt, dead in trespasses and in sins.

As Adam came from the hands of God, Adam was not *nothing*. God made man glorious, and he was the crown of the creation. God made Adam glorious spiritually. He possessed the image of God; God made Adam good, righteous, and holy. He knew and loved God. God was Adam's life, his friend, and his sovereign. And Adam served God as God's friend and servant.

Adam became *nothing* by the instigation of the devil and through an act of Adam's own willful disobedience. The devil promised Adam everything and left him with nothing. Because of his sin, God stripped Adam of everything. God took away the garden. He took Adam's life

and stripped him of his spiritual glory by taking away the image of God. All the light in Adam became darkness. He was judged by God to be worthy of death, and Adam became dead in his trespasses and sins. He was liable to temporal and eternal death. Adam became nothing.

All men became nothing *in Adam*. The contrast in verses 30 and 31 is not that by their own wicked deeds men became nothing, but in Christ they become something. The contrast is between what men became in Adam and what they become in Christ. The whole human race became nothing in Adam by what Adam did. Men do not need to commit another sin to be nothing; they are so conceived. Union with Adam is condemnation.

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus!

Out of that nothingness God joins the elect to Christ Jesus to be represented by him, to be joined with him, and to be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. True faith is to be engrafted into Christ, to be a branch in the vine, to be a stone on the chief cornerstone, and to be a part of God's covenant. It is a great mystery, even, the husband and his bride.

Saving union! That union with Christ is man's salvation, just as his union with Adam was his condemnation. In Adam *we are not!* In Christ Jesus *we are!* If in Adam man has nothing, then by union with Christ Jesus, man has everything.

Unspeakable riches: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

In Christ, then, Christ himself becomes wisdom from God to those who are in him. Christ is not wisdom from God to one who is in Adam. Christ is foolishness to the natural man. The natural man hears Christ Jesus preached and calls it foolishness. If he is a Greek, he says, "That preaching of Christ is stupid. There is wisdom outside of Christ, and I do not need Christ. I can find wisdom somewhere else. I can know how to live my life in the world outside of Christ." So the Greek seeks for wisdom. If the natural man is a Jew, he stumbles at Christ and the folly of the cross. He stumbles at the word that Christ alone is salvation and that outside of him there is no salvation. The Jew especially stumbles at the truth that there is no righteousness in his works of the law. Offended, he cries out, "But what about the law and my works? Doesn't a man have to repent, obey, and be a good person?"

Despising the righteousness of Christ, the Jew goes about to establish his own righteousness by his works. By this he says that his way of salvation by works is wiser—especially because he supposes that it will not make men careless and profane—and by that evil he makes Christ and his cross foolish. If righteousness were by works, why did God go through all the trouble? The natural man, whether Greek or Jew, says, “Christ is foolish.”

When God joins a man to Christ, Christ becomes wisdom from God to that man. That man sees that Christ is first in God’s decree. Christ is the very head of the covenant of grace that God determined to establish for the revelation of his own glorious name. That man sees that God arranged, ordered, and executes his decree for the glory of his own name in Christ Jesus. And that man sees that his salvation and the salvation of the elect church are subservient to that great purpose.

That Christ becomes wisdom from God to a man means that God so applies and gives Christ to him that Christ is that man’s complete salvation, and he seeks salvation in none other than Christ alone. This means that Christ alone becomes the way of salvation to that man. To the one joined to Christ, Christ himself becomes the sweetest, wisest, most glorious reality in the whole world. Because Christ is wisdom from God, that man sees all things in his life and in the world from the viewpoint of Christ Jesus. That man especially recognizes that all things serve Christ, understands all things in a new light, and sees all things from the vantage point of eternity and the purpose of God for his own glory in Christ and the salvation of his church. Because Christ is wisdom from God to that man, he stops being offended by Christ or vainly seeking wisdom—salvation—outside of Christ.

Christ becomes wisdom from God to a man in Christ because Christ becomes *righteousness* and *sanctification* to him—a two-word summary of all of the riches of Christ and of every benefit of salvation. If Christ is righteousness and sanctification to a man, there is nothing needful for his life and salvation.

If Christ becomes righteousness to a man, he is justified; his sins are forgiven; and God adopts him as his child, blesses him in all things, and afterward receives him into the glory of the perfection of God’s covenant. Oh yes, being righteousness to the one in him, Christ is also that man’s sanctification. The one without the other cannot be. Because Christ is righteousness to him, then also in Christ that man is drawn near to God and in Christ stands in the presence of God. Then from Christ comes his eternal Spirit to cleanse that man’s heart from sin’s bondage and pollution. In union with Christ, Christ himself becomes a man’s righteousness and his sanctification, so that Christ is that man’s whole salvation.

Oh, not Christ *and works*. That cannot be. It is not Christ *and obedience*. Justification is not by works. Sanctification is not by works. Christ alone is that man’s righteousness and his sanctification.

By faith alone!

Christ becomes a man’s righteousness and his sanctification by faith alone because it is by faith that he is united to Christ and made a member of his corporation and kept in communion with him and all his riches.

Because Christ redeemed us, body and soul, he is our justification and sanctification and is wisdom from God to us. He becomes salvation to us because he accomplished all that salvation for us upon the tree of the cross by all his blood, sweat, and tears and by his hellish anguish. There he satisfied the justice of God, fulfilled all righteousness, accomplished all obedience, paid for all sin.

Saving union!

We are not joined to Christ so that we might be enabled to be saved. But being joined to Christ, we *are* saved—saved fully and completely.

Of God!

This union is not of you, of your works, or of your will. This union is of God! It is wholly and exclusively of God. It is of God in its beginning, in its maintenance, and in its perfection.

Of God!

The union is of God, and all the blessings of that union are of God. The blessings of wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification are not of you—of your works, of your repentance, of your obedience, or of your will. The blessings are of God.

Those whom God joins to Christ are the foolish, the weak, the despised, and things that *are not*. Because they *are not*, they have nothing in themselves. Everything they receive and everything they are, they receive and become in union with Christ, that is, of God.

When we became nothing in Adam, that was Adam’s fault, but it was *of God*. Yes, it is very true that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God. It was part of God’s eternal plan of salvation that the world did not know him. God did not desire every man to know him. He did not desire that man come to know him in Adam or that man be received into God’s fellowship and friendship in Adam. It was not God’s plan that Adam would obey God and take himself and the entire human race into eternal glory. Adam was created to fall. It was of God that Adam fell in order that man would become nothing in Adam. It was of God that man by himself, by his wisdom, and by his works cannot attain unto the knowledge of God, the covenant, and salvation! God made sure of that in Adam for the whole human race.

But of God are ye in Christ! Yes! God brought man to nothing in order that God might save man from nothing in order that God might be everything. He did that for the sake of the revelation of his marvelous wisdom and his glorious name in Christ.

God determined the union. Before the world was we were joined to Christ in election and appointed to enjoy union with him and the riches of the salvation that is in him.

According to that sovereign determination, God joins us to Christ.

From everlasting to everlasting!

We glory in the Lord. Yes, now we do. But that will be heaven when we glory with the multitude that no man can number and with all the angels, when all will transparently and perfectly praise God for his infinite wisdom, his amazing grace, and his justice.

The union is of God. God cannot change. His purpose cannot change. His grace cannot be resisted.

The union is with Christ. He cannot be overcome who overcame sin, death, hell, and the grave and to whom God gave all power in heaven and earth and who now intercedes for us at the right hand of God.

To the praise of God's glorious name.

Let him who glorify in the Lord!

A boast by man!

A man boasts in that in which he trusts and in which he rests for life and salvation, for time and eternity. If a man's boast is only in this life, it is a foolish boast, and that man is shallow and wretched and of all men most miserable. Man must have something beyond this life.

Your boast can be in man. You can boast in man's will, man's strength, man's repentance, man's obedience, or man's wisdom. But if you boast in man, you cannot boast in God. Such boasting in man is damnable boasting.

You can boast in God. You can give all praise, honor, and glory to him and ascribe all salvation to him from eternity to eternity. You can rejoice in this truth, shouting it from the housetops and in the streets: of him are we in Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But then you cannot boast in man. Such boasting in God is glorious boasting.

Also, man *must* boast. The apostle does not give man an option not to boast. Man must boast either in himself or in God; but boast he must, and boast he will.

Man *must* boast in the matter of salvation. That is why the haters of the truth often accuse the believer of being proud. He does boast. He must boast. The accuser of him boasts too. The difference is that wherein they boast. The accuser hates the boast of the believer because the believer

will boast only in God, which makes man, those who trust in men, nothing except robbers of the glory of God and boasters in men. "You are proud," the accuser says because the believer does not speak of the truth of his salvation as a matter of opinion or as something that can be taken or left but as the absolute truth, which a man must believe if he will be saved. He must have Christ as wisdom from God, righteousness imputed by God to him by faith alone, and sanctification worked in him by the power of the Spirit—all on the basis of Christ's perfect atoning death alone in his place—or he has nothing, remains nothing before God, and will thus also be condemned by God. And man's boasting in man charges that with evil.

But if a man claims to confess the doctrines of salvation by grace without boasting, by that fact he denies the doctrine of salvation because God saves men in union with Christ in order for them to boast. Those two things—salvation and not boasting—are utterly incongruous.

Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. Let him confess that he is nothing and that of God he is in Christ and that God is everything.

Besides, it belongs to a man's gracious salvation that he actually does boast. He cannot help himself. If a man teaches the doctrines of grace and then commands his audience not to boast, he contradicts the apostle and the Spirit, who commanded men to boast. The true doctrine of salvation will both have man boast and have that boasting be in God. The fact that God makes Christ wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to a man issues forth in his boasting in God.

The issue then between truth and lie is not whether man will boast but what kind of boasting man will be doing. He will boast in God, or he will boast in man.

If a man says that he will be saved because he has accepted Christ; has done some saving works; trusted and obeyed; was faithful in the covenant; or has done anything for his salvation, however so little, he will be damned. That is a man's refusing to become nothing before God. That is a man's thinking that he is something apart from Christ. In that pride, which is nothing more than the continuation and development of Adam's original sin in the garden, that man will perish.

A man must be nothing before God. God calls the things that are not and raises the dead. A man must be nothing in order that God be everything in making Christ, his Son, wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to that man.

He who boasts—and boast he must—let him boast in God.

—NJL

THE SCHOOLS AND EMIGRATION

In the last editorial we considered the first Christian school of the *Afscheiding* in Smilde, the Netherlands. This time we return to the Netherlands at the time of the *Afscheiding* to see the tremendous pressure that the state and the false church brought to bear against the Seceders' Reformed schools. The Seceders' desire for freedom to have their own Christian schools became one of the chief factors in their decision to emigrate from the Netherlands. The Christian school is the birthright of Reformed churches, for which our fathers left their beloved homeland.

The Antithesis in the Netherlands

The *Afscheiding* of 1834 in the Netherlands revealed a sharp division between people. This division between people was the antithesis. On one side was the general public. The vast majority of people in the Netherlands remained members of the *Hervormde Kerk*—the state Reformed church—which enjoyed the Dutch government's seal of approval. The people supported their state schools, where the academics were the envy of the world. On the other side were the Seceders. These were the men and women who, due to the apostasy of the state church, had seceded from that church in the *Afscheiding*, beginning in the town of Ulrum under the leadership of two elders and three deacons. The ministers of the *Afscheiding* included Rev. Hendrik de Cock, Rev. Albertus van Raalte, and Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp.

The antithesis between these two peoples had been present before the *Afscheiding*. The one people not only was happy with the state church but also was filled with pride in their impressive institutions. Their churches were full, and their schools were thriving. The other people had already withdrawn from as much of the life of the state church as they could. They did not attend public worship on Sundays but met together in conventicles, instructing each other by means of exhortations and prayers. Nevertheless, they were still members of the state church by name, and they were compelled to send their children to the state's schools.

With the *Afscheiding* the division between these two peoples was revealed with all of its sharp edges. The general public remained in the state church, while the Seceders organized their own churches under the leadership

of their ministers. The general public remained in the state schools, while the Seceders organized their own private Christian schools at great cost and under tremendous pressure. The general public hated the Seceders and applauded the government for harrying them at every opportunity. The Seceders publicly announced that the state church was apostate; and, while they submitted to the government in all things, they disobeyed the government's antichristian rules. The division between the two peoples in the Netherlands that had been present before the *Afscheiding* was brought into stark relief by the Seceders' separation from the state church.

The *Afscheiding* illustrates the truth that there is a real spiritual division between people. There is an unbridgeable antithesis between the children of light and the children of darkness. Christ has no concord with Belial, and the believer has no concord with an infidel. The antithesis manifests itself in the believer's spiritual separation from the unbeliever. Although the believer still lives in the world with the unbeliever, still works in the same fields as the unbeliever, and still shops at the same markets with the unbeliever, there is a wide spiritual gulf between the believer and the unbeliever. They live out of entirely different spiritual principles. The believer is illuminated by the word of God and walks after the Spirit of God. The unbeliever is blind and walks after his own dead spirit. In the Netherlands after 1834, this spiritual antithesis manifested itself in separate churches and separate schools. While the great majority of the population remained in the state church and the state schools, the Seceders formed their own Reformed churches and established their own Reformed schools.

The School Struggle

Life after the *Afscheiding* was very difficult for the Seceders. They had expected this, and they would not have traded away the gospel that God had restored to them for all of the ease in the world. They well knew that in following their Lord, they had to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow him into the same persecution and suffering that the wicked world had heaped upon the savior.

The Seceders were hated by their neighbors, their coworkers, their former friends, their families, and really the entire society of the Netherlands. The people of the

Netherlands saw the Seceders as a threat to their material prosperity and their gilded religion. The people in the Netherlands were fiercely proud of themselves. They were highly educated, and they were very religious. Even the peasants in society could read and write. Dutch merchant ships sailed the world over, bringing home wealth and wonder. Everyone in the nation was a member of the state church. They all had their “Sunday best.” They all appeared in their beautiful church buildings on the Lord’s days and sang until the rafters rang. They had learned ministers. They had diligent statesmen. They had a hard-working society that valued cleanliness and order. But those Seceders threatened it all! They drew people away from the state church and the state schools. One state official made this remark to the Seceders: “You break everything; first you wreck our church, now you wreck our schools.”¹

It is perhaps well known that the Seceders suffered much to establish their own Reformed churches. Fines were levied, and people went to jail, including Reverend de Cock. What is perhaps not so well known is that the Seceders suffered as much and sometimes more to establish their own Reformed schools. The *Afscheiding* was just as much a school struggle as it was a church struggle. One church historian observed, “For the Seceders the restoration of the church was tied irreversibly to the reformation of the schools.”² This stands to reason, for the state church and the state schools had both apostatized from the Reformed faith. Therefore, a reformation of the church also had to include a reformation of the schools. The Seceders considered it wholly inadequate to return to the Reformed faith only in church but desired to return to the Reformed faith also in their schools.

Few Options

Immediately after the *Afscheiding* in 1834, the Seceders had few options for the education of their children. The first option, which was not really an option, was to keep their children in the state schools. There they would be

reared in the same dead religion that plagued the state church. Sometimes a sound Christian teacher could still be found in a state school, so that some Seceder parents felt they could still use the school. But for many the state schools were simply not an option. The historian Janet Sjaarda Sheeres lists several reasons that the Seceders did not want to use the state schools, both before and after the *Afscheiding*. Portions of four of the most important reasons are quoted here.

1. Heidelberg Catechism

The first has to do with the fundamental difference of doctrine being taught in the school—namely liberal Protestantism versus orthodox Calvinism. Every person, the State declared, could with a good education, become a model citizen, a good and decent person, and a worthwhile member of society. It was all a matter of upbringing. The Seceders, however, argued that

a person was born in sin and prone to all matter (*sic*) of misery and evil, yes, even to damnation itself, unless he was born again... This is what they believed and what they wanted their children to be taught. The prohibition

of the Heidelberg Catechism as a teaching tool for the doctrine of sin-salvation-service became a major issue.

2. Fundamental Differences about Human Life and Eternal Life

The authors of the law of 1806 saw these statutes as a means to develop useful citizens for the Kingdom of the Netherlands.³ To further the nation’s well-being in this world—not the next. The Seceders were not concerned with this world. *They were not of this world...* So for them, the education of their children’s souls was of much greater importance than the mere development of their minds, which only led to perdition...

The Christian school is the birthright of Reformed churches, for which our fathers left their beloved homeland.

1 H. Bouma, as quoted in 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), 43. I am indebted to Sheeres for much of the information in this editorial, including her many quotations and translations of original sources. I am also indebted to Sheeres for her insight, which has become the thesis of this editorial, that the Seceders’ emigration to America was driven to a large degree by their desire to establish their own Reformed schools. The quotation is my translation of the Dutch.

2 Sheeres, “The Struggle for the Souls of the Children,” 42.

3 See the previous editorial for an explanation of the education law of 1806. Andrew Lanning, “The *Afscheiding*’s First Christian School,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 11 (February 2023): 9–10.

3. Vaccination

In 1823, the State decreed that all children attending public school had to be vaccinated against smallpox. Many of the Seceders were against vaccination. They reasoned that Jesus clearly stated, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor...”⁴ Also, the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 10 stated that “...health and sickness...come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand.” So anyone using vaccination was running ahead of the Lord by protecting himself against any chastisement the Lord might want to impose upon him. Unless a child came to school with proof of vaccination, he or she was not allowed to attend. Nevertheless, parents still had to pay the school tax, whether the child attended or not. This wholesale refusal to be vaccinated only strengthened the State’s prejudice against the Seceders, marking them not only as church trouble makers, but also as a public health threat.

4. Baptismal Promises

Many parents felt that when they promised at baptism, “to instruct these children...in the aforesaid doctrine, and cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power,” they could not then in good conscience send their children to what they saw as a secular school. Either they had to make a false promise in church, or they had to withhold their children from school.⁵

The Seceders’ second option for the education of their children, which also was not really an option, was to take their children out of the state schools and educate them at home. It was a misguided homeschool movement among the Seceders. This movement proved to be popular among the Seceders, especially since Reverend de Cock advocated it. Many of the Seceders pursued homeschooling to their great disaster.

The...most drastic measure was to keep the children home from school. In the summer of 1837, the consistory of the newly formed Secession congregation in Midwolda, province of Groningen, admonished its members that it was their Christian duty to keep their children out of school. According to Derk Hoksbergen, an influential

farmer from Wilsum near Kampen, “The schools are just as rotten as the churches and if we don’t want to attend those churches, how can we send our children to those schools?”

Because he was against vaccination, and because of liberalism being taught, Hendrik De Cock, the leader of the Secession movement, kept his own children out of school and advocated the Seceders to do so as well. That they heeded his words and kept their children home is evidenced by county reports such as the one in Heerde which mentions a decrease in attendance year after year beginning in 1835.⁶

This homeschooling movement proved to be a tragedy for the *Afscheiding*. The generation who was home-schooled was hardly educated. This was not merely an intellectual or technical tragedy, as if the only ill effects were that that generation did not know some facts and could not find jobs. This homeschooling movement was also a spiritual tragedy. The purpose of Reformed education is twofold: that the covenant children learn to know God in all his works and that the children be prepared to serve God in all their callings. God’s works include the whole creation; all of history; the gifts of language, numbers, and beauty; and every other facet of human life on earth. Therefore, the study of mathematics in a Reformed school does not merely teach the children how to add numbers but also shows them the glory of our orderly God. Every subject in the curriculum—from history to science to art to literature to choir to band to foreign language to mathematics—teaches the children to know God in all his works. And the children will someday be called by God to serve him in a particular vocation, whether mother in the home or farmer in the field or accountant in an office or business owner or building subcontractor or ditch digger or senator or father or elder or deacon. The children will take up those vocations not merely as jobs but also as children of God’s covenant who have been called by their God to serve him in that particular station and calling. Every subject in the curriculum—from college prep classes to shop class to home economics class and everything in between—prepares the children to serve God in their callings. A child who is hardly educated is not merely a child who lacks some facts or can’t find a job but also is a child who has not properly been taught his covenant God.

4 Sheeres quotes here from Matthew 9:12 in the New International Version. In the King James Version this passage reads, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

5 Sheeres, “The Struggle for the Souls of the Children,” 39–41. The emphasis is Sheeres’.

6 Sheeres, “The Struggle for the Souls of the Children,” 45.

For the *Afscheiding* the effect of this homeschool movement was that the homeschooled generation of young men was not at all ready for seminary. In 1854, twenty years after the *Afscheiding*, the Theological School at Kampen opened to prepare Seceders for the ministry. Forty men applied for admission. Three of the forty men could not read or write well enough to submit an admissions essay. Not one of the forty men had had any high school education. All forty of the men had received “only a very poor elementary education.”⁷

The *Afscheiding’s* dabbling in homeschooling illustrated why God requires that the Christian schools be maintained. The Reformed confession regarding God’s requirement of the schools is found in Lord’s Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Q. 103. What doth God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 128)

Although not the only reason, one reason that God requires Christian schools is that without them there can be no ministers of the gospel. The church can establish a fine new seminary. It can build up ample funds for its active and emeritus ministers. But if there are no schools, all of the seminaries and simoleons in the world will not make a single minister of the gospel.

Zacharias Ursinus explains this need for Christian schools in his commentary on Lord’s Day 38.

The maintenance of schools may be embraced under this part of the honor which is due to the ministry; for unless the arts and sciences be taught, men can neither become properly qualified to teach, nor can the purity of doctrine be preserved and defended against the assaults of heretics.⁸

When the fathers of the *Afscheiding* adopted this homeschooling mentality, they got the first part of the equation right: take the children out of the corrupt state schools. Derk Hoksbergen was absolutely correct when he said, “The schools are just as rotten as the churches and if we don’t want to attend those churches, how can we send our children to those schools?” But those fathers of the *Afscheiding* who homeschooled got the second part of the equation wrong: leave the children at home. The solution to the corruption of the state schools was not homeschooling but the establishment and maintenance

of the *Afscheiding’s* own Reformed Christian schools. The establishment of their own schools was the third and best option, and really the only option, for the Seceders in the education of their children.

Afscheiding Schools

Many of the Seceders pursued with great zeal the establishment of their own Reformed schools. At every turn they were met with opposition from government officials, who enjoyed the full support of Dutch society in general. Sheeres tells the tale.

The Chief Inspector, H. Wijnbeek, an honorable, hard working Christian, could not be objective when it came to the Seceders. “He detested people who joined separatist churches, were against vaccination, wouldn’t sing hymns, and who would have nothing to do with the concept of ‘one church’ but instead endorsed sectarianism.” Wijnbeek took it upon himself to visit almost all the schools in the Netherlands between 1833 and 1844 (some 5000), and made reports on all of them. And woe to that schoolmaster found teaching anything other than the authorized curriculum. Time and again, the Seceders desire for their own schools was seen as extreme *antisocial behavior*. Wijnbeek’s observation: “First you wreck our church, now you wreck our schools.”

The Seceders begged the King for permission to start their own schools. After all, the law allowed for private schools. They were willing to pay all the costs themselves as long as they could appoint their own teachers. Although it allowed these schools, the State retained the right to approve the application and to inspect the schools, and if they were found wanting, to close them down. The authorities used this leverage to keep private schools from sprouting up, as was the case with the very first Christian School started in Smilde, province of Drenthe, with Douwe Vander Werp as the first teacher. He had the required teacher certification, and the parents were willing to pay Douwe’s salary, yet the State came to inspect the premises, found it wanting, and closed it down.⁹

Nevertheless, the determined fathers and mothers of the *Afscheiding* continued to find ways to maintain

7 Sheeres, “The Struggle for the Souls of the Children,” 46.

8 Zacharias Ursinus and G. W. Williard, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Company, 1888), 570.

9 Sheeres, “The Struggle for the Souls of the Children,” 42–43. The emphasis is Sheeres’.

schools. These schools rarely had all of the form that one would expect in a school. There were no school buildings and no registration with the state, and all of that was against the law. The parents gathered the children in barns and homes. Sometimes the parents could hire a teacher; sometimes a mother took over the instruction. But for all of their lack of form, these were good Christian schools, as the parents of God's covenant educated their covenant seed together. And for their obedience to God in laboring together to rear their children in Reformed education, the Seceders faced increasing persecution from the state. Again, Sheeres tells the tale.

Others bypassed the law by forming clandestine schools. The State said that it was not the business of the State to teach religion since that was the parents' duty, and hence, it allowed for children to gather for religious education. In Heerde, Smilde, Dwingelo, Hoogeveen, and many other places in the province of Drenthe, parents gathered children in homes or barns and hired a teacher to give religious instruction. However, with the approval of the parents, (not the law) these teachers also taught the children reading, writing, and arithmetic.

That is, when the coast was clear. If a school inspector was found to be anywhere in the vicinity, all ABC primers were hid, and the Bible and catechism booklets put on full display. Albert Gort, deacon of the Secession church in Hoozeveen taught in this manner for four years. After the children were all inside, he simply bolted the door, giving him enough time to put away the illicit materials and have the children sing a psalm should the inspector knock on the door. Because of the growing number of such "clandestine" school groups, the school inspector of Drenthe wrote to the Minister of the Interior "to step in with force, because unpunished, these schools would flourish like weeds." Indeed, the inspector encouraged civil actions against anyone attempting to teach unlawfully...

Women were not exempt from prosecution either. On January 23, 1838, the Civil Court

at Arnhem dealt with the matter against Grietje Takken, wife of Hendrik Bosch at Heerde. Grietje was accused of giving lessons to children without having the proper license to do so. On December 28, 1837, Grietje taught children in the wooden shoe factory of her husband. The ABC primer that she used was taken as evidence, and Grietje, six months pregnant at the time, was sentenced to three days in jail and courts costs of f5.29.¹⁰

Emigration for the Sake of Schools

The Seceders' spiritual and godly desire for their own Christian schools meant that life became more and more intolerable for them in the Netherlands under the harassment and persecution of the state. As the persecution continued, the saints of the *Afscheiding* began to consider leaving their homeland behind.

Their first choice for emigration was the tropical island of Java in Indonesia, about as different a place as one can imagine from the swamps of western Michigan, where the Seceders who emigrated would ultimately end up establishing the town of Holland. Indonesia, known at that time as the Dutch East Indies, was appealing to the Seceders because it was a Dutch colony, heavily involved in the spice trade. If the Seceders could join the colony in Java, they could remain citizens of the Netherlands. The Seceders approached the Dutch government with the request that they be permitted to help colonize Java. Reverend Scholte, one of the main leaders of the *Afscheiding*, and a certain Reverend Heldring "took it upon themselves to go to His Excellency, the Minister of Colonial Affairs, to acquaint the government with this matter and to persuade it to guide the movement of emigration in that direction by giving freedom, opening the way, and granting privileges. Their answer, as far as Java was concerned, was negative."¹¹

After receiving the government's negative answer and after publishing their own answer to the government's objections, the Seceders began to rethink their initial plan to go to Java. Positive reports from North America were flooding the Netherlands, and it appeared to the beleaguered saints of the *Afscheiding* that God was opening a door to the West rather than to the East. Finally,

10 Sheeres, "The Struggle for the Souls of the Children," 44–47.

11 A. Brummelkamp and A. C. van Raalte, "Emigration, or, Why Do We Promote the Migration of People to North America and Not to Java?" in *Van Raalte Papers: 1840–1849*, trans. Harry Boonstra (1846), 22; https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/vrp_1840s/240. One who now lives in North America and traces his ancestry back to the Netherlands cannot help but stagger at how different his life would have been had the Minister of Colonial Affairs granted the Seceders' request that day. The entire Dutch Reformed line that we trace from the Reformed Protestant Churches back to the Protestant Reformed Churches back to the Christian Reformed Church back to Van Raalte and the *Afscheiding* immigrants would have developed on the various islands of Indonesia, rather than in the now-familiar Dutch settlements in North America. In our present day, instead of going sledding in the winter at the old Van Raalte farm in Holland, Michigan, would our children pick fresh coffee beans at the old Van Raalte spice farm in Java, Indonesia? The paths of the Lord are wonderful.

in 1846, two leading ministers in the *Afscheiding*, Rev. Albertus van Raalte and Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp, published a pamphlet, *Emigration, or, Why Do We Promote the Migration of People to North America and Not to Java?* That very year Reverend van Raalte would lead a vanguard of Seceders from the Netherlands to North America, eventually settling Holland, Michigan.

What is striking about the two ministers' pamphlet is that they repeatedly cited the need to establish their own Christian schools as a compelling reason for emigration. They lamented the opposition to the Reformed school that they faced in the Netherlands and that they undoubtedly would have faced in Java. For the sake of the Christian school, they called their fellow Seceders to emigrate to America.

And are not those, who in the way of prayer to God are prepared to put forth effort, and spend money to establish their own Christian schools, and thus to do something to rescue the perishing people, denied the very foundation on which they stand?¹²

Lacking means of support, we feel the heavy hand of the Government which encroaches on the most sensitive rights of a father, compelling him to choose between two extremes, both leading to a state of wretchedness: either to let his children grow up in ignorance, or send them to a school, where, according to the father's deepest convictions, their mind will be corrupted, and where the Bible, the Word of God, is banned from the curriculum. Children as well as adults need to feed on the bread of life and drink of the water of life. The Bible is banned at the request of a third party, who bows down to idols, or teaches that children must not be encumbered with the Word of God. Those wanting to ban the Bible from the schools may differ in many things, but they agree in the view which dishonors God and glorifies man, that man is saved, at least in part, by his own works and not through faith alone. And does not proof abound that the well-meaning teacher, when his teaching makes reference to the Bible, is regarded as a lawbreaker and loses his job?

That is the present situation here in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, mind you! May we expect that it will be better in the colonies where the same government rules with the same

arbitrary spirit?...

Suppose that we colonized in the East and a preacher of the Gospel dared to proclaim the Word of God, or a brother spoke a word to brethren to edify and admonish; suppose that discipline was exercised in the congregation according to the will of God, or a Christian school was opened for children; suppose that preaching so as to lead sinners to repentance created a disturbance in the peaceful circles of the service of sin and luxury, and that the Governor-General was offended. Do you suppose we are mistaken if we judge that the Governor-General would consider it his high calling to ban that preacher, that brother, from the colony?...

But to seek residence deliberately where you know that the government does violence to one's freedom of conscience, and where parents are hindered from educating their children in the fear of God—to choose to live there for the one reason that you would then live in a colony of the Netherlands,—who would be attracted to that?...

But we do desire to live a quiet life in all honesty and godliness, and to bring up our children to fear God and teach them to love the principles to which we hold. Because this is denied us and made impossible to most of us, for that reason we direct our eyes to a strange land. Because of our deep concern for our children we need not think of our own colonies.¹³

The Seceders who emigrated desired “complete freedom—freedom in their civilian life, freedom in their religious life, both with reference to the school and the church.”¹⁴

The historian Janet Sjaarda Sheeres contends that freedom to establish Christian schools was as much a driving force for the Seceders' emigration as anything else. She provides several additional citations from primary and secondary sources to demonstrate it.

While it is commonly acknowledged that the Seceders under Van Raalte left the Netherlands to settle in America for freedom to worship and to improve their lot materially, there was a third, equally compelling reason why they chose to pack their bags for America, namely freedom to give their children a religious-based education in keeping with their beliefs...

12 Brummelkamp and Van Raalte, “Emigration, or, Why Do We Promote the Migration of People to North America and Not To Java?,” 8.

13 Brummelkamp and Van Raalte, “Emigration, or, Why Do We Promote the Migration of People to North America and Not To Java?,” 16–18.

14 Brummelkamp and Van Raalte, “Emigration, or, Why Do We Promote the Migration of People to North America and Not To Java?,” 19.

After arriving in America, Van Raalte wrote to Brummelkamp on January 30, 1847, "I am glad that I can now say with my whole heart to the Seceded Churches, which in Holland enjoy a limited freedom, but in the education of their children no freedom at all, Come over, and enjoy this good land of liberty."

Dutch historians, Alle and Hendrik Algra wrote: "One of the most important motives for emigration by the Seceders was that in the Netherlands there was no freedom of education. One must take that literally. It was not possible for anyone to organize a private school." Dutch historian, I. J. Brugmans observed, "There have been complaints that it was easier to obtain permission from The Hague to run a brothel than to run a private school."¹⁵

Concluding, Sheeres writes the following:

Because there are no specific entries in the emigration ledgers stating "school issues" as a reason for emigrating, and we therefore do not have a precise count, we may be sure that many who wrote "religious freedom" as the cause of their emigration meant "freedom to teach our children as we see fit." To them, these two freedoms were indistinguishable. Anthony Brummelkamp wrote to Groen van Prinsterer: "For us, who have landed outside of the Reformed Church denomination, the question of Church and School was one. We saw the schools equally as decayed as the church."

The 1846 synodical gathering of the Secession churches identified the school situation as *the* cause of emigration. In a (1846) letter to the king pleading for the right to have private schools, the consistory of Hoogeveen informed his majesty that many were emigrating for this reason, and unless the king dealt with the problem, *all* those who desired freedom of education for their children would leave the country.

The first ones to be shipped out under the

auspices of the newly formed Emigration Society on May 28, 1846 were Derk and Louise Arnoud and children; William and Neeltje Kwinkelenberg and children, and Jan Jacob and Nieske Arnoud, all driven by the hope to be able to achieve Christian education for their children.

Egbert Dunnewind, a teacher at Rheeze, ran into trouble with the law when he became an elder in Van Raalte's congregation. The school supervisor brought charges against Dunnewind on grounds of article 23 "...that the teaching of denominational doctrines by schoolteachers will not be allowed." After considerable struggle with the authorities, Dunnewind threw in his lot with Van Raalte, and although the reason

for his departure in the official record states "religious freedom," the reason noted in the church minutes of Heemse, dated August 1846, state: "*The principle reason for our departure is as follows: to seek for our children Christian schools which we cannot find here.*"¹⁶

And what of mother Grietje, who was jailed for three days for teaching children in the wooden shoe factory?

As a result, she and Hendrik and their children sailed to America in 1847. On their way west, Hendrik and two of their children passed away in Buffalo, N.Y. Later, in the colony, Grietje married Aalt Kamper. She died at age eighty-eight, having seen all the promises of freedom in spite of hardship. She was one of the many who looked to America for freedom, not only to worship, but also to educate.¹⁷

Conclusion

Wherever one turns in the history of the Reformed churches, the school issue is a prominent theme. Not only was the *Afscheiding* a school struggle as much as it was a church struggle, but the Seceders' emigration to North America also was largely driven by the need for Christian schools. The Reformed father and mother

Not only was the *Afscheiding* a school struggle as much as it was a church struggle, but the Seceders' emigration to North America also was largely driven by the need for Christian schools.

15 Sheeres, "The Struggle for the Souls of the Children," 35.

16 Sheeres, "The Struggle for the Souls of the Children," 46-47. The emphasis is Sheeres'.

17 Sheeres, "The Struggle for the Souls of the Children," 47.

who feed on the gospel of Jesus Christ on Sunday can be satisfied with nothing less than that their children be reared in that gospel the rest of the week. The Reformed people who suffer the reproach of Christ together at the hands of the world and the false church are also privileged to labor together in God's covenant in the rearing of their covenant seed. God has been good to the Reformed Protestant Churches in giving us this conviction and in establishing our schools. The Christian school is our Reformed birthright. Let us be grateful for it, treasure it, and not sell it.

The history of the Christian school also illustrates that God does not despise the day of small beginnings. Barns, wooden shoe shops, and humble homes have been God's setting where his people have reared his covenant seed. Teachers, deacons, and pregnant mothers have been God's instruments in bringing to pass his grand covenant purpose of Christian education. What all men must count as nothing, God makes the nursery of his church.

The Reformed school. How humble! How grand!

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

In this issue two editors continue their series. Rev. Nathan Langerak continues his evaluation of Professor Gritters' speech on un-forgiveness, demonstrating that Professor Gritters' doctrine of *unforgiven* is essentially Roman Catholic. The undersigned goes back to the *Afscheiding* to demonstrate that one of the primary reasons for the emigration of the Seceders was that they might establish their own Reformed schools. We also publish a letter and reply regarding preaching and church membership.

The editors have also made a change in the staff of *Sword and Shield*. Rev. Martin Vander Wal has been removed as an editor of the magazine, on the ground that his Formula of Subscription examination at the Reformed Protestant classis in January revealed that he is not Reformed according to the confessions. Because the

purpose of *Sword and Shield* is to promote the Reformed faith, the two remaining editors judged that a man who has revealed himself as not Reformed according to the confessions cannot serve as an editor of the magazine.

Readers who are interested in seeing the examination for themselves can watch the proceedings at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ni8BZJixEbo>.

Reverend VanderWal's rubrics have been discontinued in this issue, but further decisions about the future of the rubrics are still being made. Personally, I am thankful to be part of an association and publication that takes the Reformed faith this seriously. It is refreshing to be united by the truth in the cause of publishing the Reformed faith.

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 (2): HANDLING THE WORD OF GOD DECEITFULLY

Prof. B. Gritters of the Protestant Reformed Churches recently gave a speech about forgiveness at the behest of the evangelism committee of Grace Protestant Reformed Church.¹ The venue was interesting, to say the least. Grace is a comfortable home for many abusers in the Protestant Reformed Churches. These abusers can congregate in Grace and commiserate together and be protected and coddled by supportive family, friends, and officebearers. These abusers were led in that by the former minister of Grace, himself an abuser.

One would think that Professor Gritters would have been asked to give a speech on abuse—perhaps spousal abuse, child abuse, child sexual abuse, or abusive homosexuality in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). And if not these topics, then perhaps a speech on the lessons that had been learned from the fact that Grace Protestant Reformed Church stubbornly harbored and protected abusers. Or maybe a soul-searching speech on the corrupt and self-serving application of Matthew 18 and the subjects of forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation regarding abused women, boys, and girls.

The officebearers led the way in making the sin of abuse a matter of forgiveness on the part of the abused and gave aid and comfort to those who had abused them by means of that false application of the doctrine of forgiveness. I say this because in the speech Professor Gritters illustrated by examples what he was saying, and he used various scenarios in order to apply his doctrine.

However, he had a perfect opportunity to apply the subject of the speech to abused people in the Protestant Reformed Churches. In the PRC abused women were fed all kinds of false information about forgiveness. They were told to go back to their violent husbands and that they had to be more loving and forgiving and to keep on loving and forgiving. After all, these women had been forgiven a great debt! Before there was ever a stitch

of true repentance on the part of the abuser, the elders would instruct about reconciliation of the abused with the abuser. The wife must take back her abusive husband. He is, after all, sorry. Members who had been molested as children were told that they had to go the way of Matthew 18! Some were actually put through surprise confrontations with their abusers because consistories had decided that the abusers were repentant and that to make things right, the abusers should say sorry to those whom they had abused. No victims were consulted on what they thought of the abusers. The consistories made those decisions on their own. I could multiply examples, and Professor Gritters also knows of these examples. He has been involved in them.

I find this aspect of the speech disgusting. Why was there no application to the current abysmal state of affairs in the Protestant Reformed Churches regarding abuse of all kinds—a state of affairs that was created by twisting, distorting, and misapplying the doctrines of forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation? The speech was entitled “The Confusion about Forgiveness,” and the subject of abuse is one area of life in which the Protestant Reformed Churches have actively sown massive confusion on the matter of forgiveness in order to cover up abuse, violent and sexual, in the PRC. And there was not a word about that from Professor Gritters.

The most he could muster was to tell a sexually abused person that he or she should not go to confront the abuser alone. So Professor Gritters said about Matthew 18 the following:

If you have been sinned against with sexual abuse, you don’t go by yourself. That is an exception. But any other sin, you go by yourself.

He just made up this exception. Why is it an exception? Notice though that, according to Professor Gritters,

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>.

the sexually abused person still must follow the way of Matthew 18—just “don’t go by yourself.”

Let me say this: sexual abuse in the church is by its nature a public sin because it is an imminent threat to all the children of the church. Sexual abuse warrants an immediate report to the consistory, and the consistory must take up that report and investigate it. Instructing the sexually abused person to go the way of Matthew 18 all but guarantees that the issue will never come back to the consistory and will never be dealt with in the church.

Professor Gritters so graciously allowed an exception to the instruction of Matthew 18 that the one sinned against must go alone—he still has to go. But what did Professor Gritters advise about all the other forms of violence and abuse, for instance, child abuse or spousal abuse? He said, “Any other sin, you go by yourself.” The abused in those situations are on their own, according to Professor Gritters.

Some pastor. He did not preach the gospel of free forgiveness, and he did not deliver the weak from the hand of the oppressor.

In this light the speech, if nothing else, was a total dereliction of duty on his part, especially as the professor of pastoral theology in the Protestant Reformed seminary. The subject of the speech was right. The venue was right. The time was right. It was his calling. But there was no word from him. Still more, in its application the speech was dangerous because in the name of the truth it provided cover for the abuser in the church.

The application of the speech was bad because the doctrine was bad. The doctrine was bad because there was no basis for it in the creeds or in scripture.

One can summarize the doctrine of the whole speech in a few words. It 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 dependent 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 for any sins of which the sinner does not specifically repent. A sinner can even remain unforgiven when he dies!

Unforgiven!

This message was in essence the same as Rome’s, according to the Reformed creeds. Professor Gritters said that he was not going to quote the creeds much. But if he had studied the creeds more on the matter of forgiveness, perhaps he would have noticed the eerie similarity between his teaching and Rome’s. Rome’s message, too, is

that there is not forgiveness. Rome’s message is that there is not forgiveness unless...!

Answer 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism describes Rome’s doctrine:

The mass teaches that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 116)

The gospel of Rome is that the living and the dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ. Rome’s message is *unforgiven*. Such is also the gospel of Professor Gritters. He said, “*Forgiveness is not in eternity*.” Forgiveness is not in eternity.

And later, when he was speaking of the cross, he said,

There are others who’ve said that 2,000 years ago was forgiveness in the cross and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus...I understand why some say that’s forgiveness. But it isn’t.

The cross is not forgiveness.

Unforgiven!

It matters very little that Rome’s condition for forgiveness is the sacrifice of the mass and that Professor Gritters’ condition is the repentance of man. Their gospels are the same. The living and the dead have not the pardon of sins unless...! Rome spoke of those in purgatory and the living on the earth who have not the pardon of sins. Gritters spoke of the living who have not the pardon of sins because they do not confess specific sins, the dead infant who has not the pardon of sins because he cannot confess, and the dead motorist who has not the pardon of sins because he did not get a chance to repent. The gospel is the same for Rome and for Professor Gritters: unforgiven! Different from Rome only in the condition. The same as Rome in the content of the message. And, like Rome, Professor Gritters’ gospel is no gospel at all, but it comes under the dreadful anathema of the Holy Spirit and the apostle Paul.

Professor Gritters’ doctrine is repentance for remission. You repent and confess your sins, and then and only then does God speak to you and forgive your sins. The biblical basis—he didn’t quote the creeds much, although he did do some theology based on a psalter versification—of the speech was a deceitful handling of scripture.

In 2 Corinthians 4:2 the apostle Paul warned of such a thing:

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

I call it an abuse of scripture. It is an abusive doctrine based on an abuse of scripture.

Professor Gritters maintained that there was no forgiveness in eternity and that there was no forgiveness at the cross. There is forgiveness when God says, “I forgive you.” Gritters cites as proof the story of the prophet Nathan’s confrontation with David after his sin with Bathsheba:

When David committed the horrible double sin of adultery, which we ought to call rape, and murder—the adultery with Bathsheba; she had no choice; it was rape; and the murder of her husband—David lived for a year miserable. And we need to say about David, he was in that time unforgiven. And then God’s forgiveness came to him in the form of a prophet named Nathan, who convicted David of sin; and after David was convicted the prophet Nathan said, “The LORD hath put away your sin; you will not die” (2 Sam. 12:13). That’s why I used that expression that I did at the beginning: “I have put away your sin.” God’s declaration from his mouth through the voice of a prophet—often—into the ear of the guilty sinner that goes down into his heart that embraces that truth by faith.

Remember Professor Gritters’ doctrine is first repentance, and then and only then forgiveness; repentance is for the remission of sins; repentance is unto the remission of sins. There is no forgiveness without repentance. There was no forgiveness in eternity and none at the cross.

However, there are two words in 2 Samuel 12 that he did not deal with. I quote the passage: “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).

The first word that the professor did not deal with is “also.” The word “also” does not mean that David repented, and God then *also* forgave. The word “also” must be interpreted in light of the other word that Gritters did not deal with: “hath.” So that Nathan said, “Hath put away thy sin [forgiven].” The specific form of these words indicates a past event with a present significance. In the past, before Nathan said a word and before David said a word, Jehovah had forgiven David his sin. Since the cross was not yet, except in promise, the meaning is that Jehovah, by an unchanging and eternal word, had forgiven David his sin. And that unchanging word of forgiveness explains the word “also.” The meaning is that Jehovah, according to his unchanging word of forgiveness, had given to David his repentance too. Jehovah had not done that so that he might be able to forgive

David. Jehovah already had forgiven David and given to David his whole salvation, repentance, and forgiveness. It was not Jehovah’s will that David continue in his sin, and thus Jehovah had granted repentance to David. Eternally, Jehovah had willed repentance for David, and thus Jehovah worked it. He also eternally had willed David’s forgiveness and thus spoke to him. There is no forgiveness for repentance in 2 Samuel 12. There are two benefits that Jehovah gave to David, or a twofold grace: the one repentance and the other forgiveness. Both proceeded from God’s eternal good pleasure for David’s salvation. The one was not dependent on the other, but both were dependent on the mercy of God alone.

So later in the speech, in his analysis of David, Professor Gritters specifically and pointedly contradicted Nathan the prophet and the Holy Spirit. Professor Gritters said,

People ask, “Really? Wasn’t David forgiven for that whole year?” because they have in their mind the idea that forgiveness is something God *decided* to do in eternity or that Jesus *paid* for 2,000 years ago; and David prior to Christ presents another problem; but the fact of the matter is, people say, “Really? You’re saying that for a whole year David wasn’t forgiven?” and the answer is a very simple yes. Yes. Because forgiveness is the declaration of God to him about that sin, “I don’t hold that against you.” And for a year he did not hear that. For those who don’t repent, God stands silent. And that’s why David’s bones waxed old in their roaring. He was miserable on account of that.

Nathan said, “The LORD also hath put away thy sin.” That is a blessed gospel to sinners. Professor Gritters preached his gospel of unforgiveness: David was unforgiven for a whole year. If Professor Gritters understood that Nathan said, “The LORD also hath put away thy sin” and also understood that David was forgiven 2,000 years before Christ, then David’s forgiveness would not be a conundrum to Professor Gritters. David was forgiven on the word of promise, which word is as sure as God is sure and as eternal as God is eternal. According to Titus 1:2, that word of promise God spoke before the world began: “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” Eternal life comes by righteousness (or forgiveness of sins). If God promised eternal life, he promised (or spoke) the word of remission too.

Professor Gritters also maintained that his gospel of repentance for remission of sins is the gospel message of John the Baptist and the apostles.

So the New Testament makes that very, very clear—the same order. *First* repentance, *then* forgiveness. Always that order. John the Baptist preached repentance *for* remission, remember (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). After Jesus’ resurrection and before he ascended, he said to his disciples, “Repentance *and* remission must be preached” and in that order. *In that order* (Luke 24:47). And so in Acts 2:38, in that first sermon of Peter, Peter said to the people, “Repent *for* the remission of sins.” *First* repentance, *then* remission. And then in the next chapter in the book of Acts, after they healed the lame man and the people stood astonished—“How did you do that?”—then Peter preached another sermon, and he said in that sermon, in Acts 3:19, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, *so that your sins may be blotted out.*” They weren’t yet. God determined to do that in eternity; Christ, a little while before, had died for those sins; but they were not yet blotted out for those people who had not yet confessed and converted.

Notice that Professor Gritters argued about order: one thing must come before another. First repentance, and without it there is no forgiveness. Repentance is for remission. And then he brought in the heavy artillery of Acts 3:19: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, *so that your sins may be blotted out.*” So all of that was to establish the point that without repentance there is no forgiveness and that repentance is very much *for/unto* the forgiveness of sins. Thus that is an established fact for Professor Gritters.

But let me examine the passages on which he based his theology, and let us see whether that is, in fact, what they mean. We read in Mark 1:4, “John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Luke 3:3 says, “He [John the Baptist] came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” Professor Gritters said that John preached “repentance *for* the remission of sins.” But in fact, what John preached was the *baptism of* repentance for the remission of sins. Now, whatever the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins means, what is clear is that if Professor Gritters’ understanding of the texts is correct and they are teaching that remission is prior to forgiveness, then the texts prove too much because in the texts it is not only repentance that is prior, but baptism is then also prior.

But I can also say something about *the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*. This phrase must be understood in light of what Matthew 3:2 says regarding what John the Baptist preached: “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The kingdom of heaven is the

same as the forgiveness of sins. God takes his people into his kingdom when he freely forgives their sins. The Heidelberg Catechism says in answer 84 that the kingdom of heaven is opened

when...it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 118)

Forgiveness of sins is the entrance into the kingdom. And I remind everyone that this means *in one’s experience*. I enter the kingdom in my experience when the gospel of the remission of sins is preached.

So you could understand John’s baptism this way: the baptism of repentance for the kingdom of God. That is how Professor Gritters would have us understand John’s preaching. He preached that in order to enter the kingdom of God you must first repent. And then Professor Gritters would have to understand Matthew 3:2 in a similar way: repent so that when the kingdom comes you may enter in. So after all this time in the PRC, repentance is still a *prerequisite* to enter the kingdom of God.

But what John meant when he preached is perfectly clear. He meant that those whom God freely adopted as his children and brought into his kingdom by faith only, these he also delivers from the power of sin and causes them to repent. But you do not have to take my word for it. Listen to John Calvin, who was not a Reformed Protestant radical:

Repent ye [in] Matthew differs from the other two Evangelists in this respect, that he relates the substance of John’s doctrine, as uttered by John himself, while they relate it in their own words; though Mark has one word more than Luke: for he says, *he came Baptizing, and preaching the baptism of repentance.* But in substance there is the most perfect agreement: for they all connect *repentance* with *the forgiveness of sins*. The *kingdom of God* among men is nothing else than a restoration to a happy life; or, in other words, it is true and everlasting happiness. When John says, that *the kingdom of God is at hand*, his meaning is, that men, who were alienated from the righteousness of God, and banished from *the kingdom of heaven*, must be again gathered to God, and live under his guidance. This is accomplished by a free adoption and *the forgiveness of sins*, by which he reconciles to himself those who were unworthy. In a word, the kingdom of heaven is nothing else than “newness of life,” (Romans 6:4) by which God restores us to the hope of a blessed

immortality. Having rescued us from the bondage of sin and death, he claims us as his own; that, even while our pilgrimage on earth continues, we may enjoy the heavenly life by faith: for he “hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” (Ephesians 1:3).²

Calvin said here that when John mentioned the kingdom, he meant that we are brought into that kingdom freely by the mercy of God through the forgiveness of sins. There in the kingdom God gives us new life, which includes our repentance. We do not come into the kingdom by repentance but by forgiveness. But if repentance is unto forgiveness, then we come into the kingdom by repentance and forgiveness. Or, according to Professor Gritters, we must first repent, and then God will forgive. Since our entrance into the kingdom is by forgiveness, then Professor Gritters has two causes for entrance into the kingdom: repentance and forgiveness; or, better, just repentance. Repentance is the act that is necessary to enter the kingdom (and I emphasize in one’s experience).

But what is the connection between forgiveness and repentance? Again, hear John Calvin:

From this doctrine [of the kingdom of God], as its source, is drawn the exhortation to *repentance*. For John does not say, “Repent ye, and in this way *the kingdom of heaven* will afterwards be *at hand*,” but first brings forward the grace of God, and then exhorts men to *repent*. Hence it is evident, that the foundation of repentance is the mercy of God, by which he restores the lost. In no other sense is it stated by Mark and Luke, that he *preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. Repentance is not placed first, as some ignorantly suppose, as if it were the ground of the forgiveness of sins, or as if it induced God to begin to be gracious to us.

We could add as well that repentance is not put first, as some ignorantly suppose, because repentance is unto forgiveness or because John was interested in a strict temporal order. Repentance is put first because it is the evidence of God’s free grace that brings a man into the kingdom. Again, hear Calvin:

Though John, when he introduces the mention of the grace of God, exhorts men to repentance, yet it must not be forgotten that repentance, not less than the inheritance of the heavenly

kingdom, is the gift of God. As he freely pardons our sins, and delivers us, by his mercy, from the condemnation of eternal death, so also does he form us anew to his image, that we may live unto righteousness. As he freely adopts us for his sons, so he regenerates us by his Spirit, that our life may testify, that we do not falsely address him as our Father. In like manner, Christ washes away our sins by his blood, and reconciles our Heavenly Father to us by the sacrifice of his death; but, at the same time, in consequence of “our old man being crucified with him, and the body of sin destroyed,” (Romans 6:6) he makes us “alive” unto righteousness. The sum of the Gospel is, that God, through his Son, takes away our sins, and admits us to fellowship with him, that we, “*denying ourselves*” and our own nature, may “live soberly, righteously, and godly,” and thus may exercise ourselves on earth in meditating on the heavenly life.

There are two graces of God that he bestows on us. The one is the free pardon of our sins by the mercy of God. The other is our renewal, by which we repent of our sins. Repentance is the sure proof that one is forgiven and has been brought into the kingdom of God. These two John put together not to establish that repentance is first and then God forgives or that repentance is unto the forgiveness of sins but to teach that these two belong together and cannot be separated and that those who are baptized and confess faith in Christ also are by the grace of God turned away from sin to a new, holy life.

Professor Gritters’ use of Acts 2:38 can be refuted similarly. First, the passage does not read as he said:

And so in Acts 2:38, in that first sermon of Peter, Peter said to the people, “Repent *for* the remission of sins.” *First* repentance, *then* remission.

Such is the supposedly simple meaning of the passage for him. But the passage reads as follows: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

I can be brief in establishing the falsity of Professor Gritters’ interpretation. If the meaning were repent *for* the forgiveness of sins, then he must also add baptism, so that the full thought would be repent and be baptized *for* the remission of sins. And if we take the passage in light of Professor Gritters’ doctrine, then the meaning

2 https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom31/calcom31.ix.xxvii.html#fnf_ix.xxvii-p35.1. Subsequent quotations of Calvin are also taken from this web page.

is that God will not forgive you until you repent and until you are baptized. But this is nonsense and Roman Catholic. Baptism itself is the seal of the forgiveness of sins received by faith only and not by faith and repentance. Then Professor Gritters also left out of view that Peter spoke not only about the gift of forgiveness but also added the promise about the Holy Spirit. So if Professor Gritters' meaning is correct, that it is repentance (and baptism) first and then remission, then one also has to add to that the promise of the Holy Spirit. So the full thought of Professor Gritters' interpretation is that it is first repentance and baptism, and then God will give forgiveness and the promise of the Holy Ghost. With that interpretation Professor Gritters also has the promise conditioned on man's repentance. When you tamper with justification by faith alone (forgiveness by faith alone), as Professor Gritters did, then you also necessarily introduce a conditional covenant. And if his interpretation of Acts 2:38 is correct, then he must necessarily espouse a conditional covenant, a covenant conditioned on man's repentance. But then you do not have a promise but an offer or a possibility.

The promise is what Professor Gritters left out of his whole speech. He left out what Peter and the other apostles did preach, which was the promise rooted in election. Peter grounded his call to repentance in the free, eternal, and unmerited grace of God in election and in God's fulfillment of the promise: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). The promise is given in election. The promise is fulfilled by God without the work or activity of man. And the promise is likewise freely given and bestowed by the grace of God. Because the promise is surely and infallibly bestowed on those whom God ordained to eternal life, then I can call to faith, repentance, and the rest, certain that God will make his own manifest in the world.

Professor Gritters also pointed to Acts 3:19:

Then Peter preached another sermon, and he said in that sermon, in Acts 3:19, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, *so that your sins may be blotted out.*" They weren't yet. God determined to do that in eternity; Christ, a little while before, had died for those sins; but they were not yet blotted out for those people who had not yet confessed and converted.

This is evidently the text that encapsulates the professor's entire theology. There was not forgiveness in eternity.

There was not forgiveness at the cross. He became very bold and said that those sins were not blotted out at the cross. Think about that for a minute. Christ died for those sins, but they were not blotted out. So Professor Gritters made the decree and the cross a contingency or a possibility until man repents. God does not forgive until man repents. Repentance is first and forgiveness second. Repentance is unto forgiveness.

But Professor Gritters did not go far enough because the language of Peter was actually to express purpose: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, in order that your sins may be blotted out." Professor Gritters will know the Greek construction. Here is what the Greek scholar Thayer said about it: "εἰς τὸ with the inf. has the force of a separate telic clause (equiv. to ἵνα with the subjunc.)."³ It is a purpose clause. This means that if Professor Gritters was correct in his explanation, then what Peter was, in fact, saying was not only that repentance is first and forgiveness second but also repent and be converted in order that your sins may be blotted out. Thus for Professor Gritters repentance and conversion are the prerequisites to the blotting out of sins (I am assuming that he takes blotting out to be equivalent to forgiveness).

But the explanation of the text is easy. First, the purpose clause simply traces repentance, conversion, forgiveness, and the whole blessedness of our salvation to the decree of God. Further, repentance inevitably accompanies faith as its spontaneous fruit. The meaning is not that the people's remission of sins would be because of or by means of their repenting or that repentance would be before forgiveness. Rather, Peter spoke of repentance as the inevitable evidence of faith in Christ, by which faith the people would be saved. The last evidence that they gave was unbelief, for they had "killed the Prince of life" (v. 15). Salvation from their sins, which salvation was pictured by the healing of the lame man, was "through faith in his name" (v. 16), that is, faith in Jesus. The evidence of their faith, because it is the inevitable fruit of faith, would be their repenting and turning from their sins.

Next time, I will deal with more of Professor Gritters' atrocious use of scripture.

Professor Gritters did not explain scripture, but he came to scripture with a theology, and he read that theology into scripture. He sucked his theology out of his thumb and proof texted that theology in scripture. We will see that in a stunning way next time. He just made things up to establish his point.

—NJL

3 Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1896; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), 185.

THE LIVING AND ABIDING WORD OF CHRIST ALONE, SAVES.

Some of you will remember that I wrote against Rev. Koole's teachings in the Standard Bearer regarding, "There is something you must do in order to be saved." Some of you may even remember that I was one of the 32 group of concerned men who started the Sword and Shield. I was one of the first who wrote Prof. Engelsma in opposition to his teaching that man is somehow first in a sense when it comes to his own salvation. I wrote the three editors of the SB rebuking them sharply for their wickedness against Rev. VanderWal in his suspension. That very letter was read to the consistory of Wingham when all seemed lost. I personally rebuked Prof. Cammenga to his face for making the whole issue to be that of antinomianism before the Synod of 2017. I was even told that my letter in the SB was the very incentive that prompted the founders of the Sword and Shield to have their first meeting. I love that truth with all my heart.

Today I stand in complete amazement and sadness over the fact that in just a very short time under the leadership of Rev. Lanning and Rev. Langerak the RPC has been led away from the Old Paths of the Reformed Faith and teachings of solid reformed men as Rev. Herman Hoeksema when it comes to the distinction between the preaching of the Gospel and the Living and abiding Word of Christ, the christian day schools as a responsibility of law and not of thankfulness and doctrines concerning faith itself. I plan on writing a separate article on each error showing clearly how this is so.

Today I take up pen and paper to address the heresy that Rev. Lanning is now teaching in FRPC in his response to a blog post writer who wrote, "The WORD does not need the Church." (See Rev. Lanning's response in his sermon on the Means of Faith 11/6/22 pm) By this statement the blog post writer obviously is referring to the Living and abiding Word of Christ in distinction from the preaching of the gospel. Whether or not that is exactly what he meant this statement is soundly Reformed and Biblical. Yet Rev. Lanning shows either his profound ignorance of this reformed truth or his willing malicious intent against it when it comes to the doctrines of regeneration, calling and that of the Living and abiding Word of Christ in distinction from the preaching of the gospel in salvation, by scoffing and ridiculing that statement. The blog writer speaks the truth, Rev. Lanning speaks the lie. Rev. Lanning not only ridicules

that statement but worse yet minimizes and mocks the Living Word of Christ and therefore Christ Himself in that sermon. It's that serious.

The teachings of Rev. Herman Hoeksema and the truth which I believe with all my heart stand in direct opposition to Rev. Lanning. For one of the best explanations anywhere to be found on the distinction between the Living and Abiding Word of Christ and the preaching of a man, listen to Rev. Herman Hoeksema's sermon on Baptism and Regeneration on I Peter 1:23-25 as recorded for us on Old Paths Recordings. In this connection Canons, Head 3 & 4 Article 12 says that this work of God is "supernatural, not inferior in efficacy to creation or the resurrection from the dead..." *In that sermon Rev. Herman Hoeksema says that this implanting of regeneration is so divine, a new creation, that he cannot understand how anyone can conceive that the preaching of a man is needed.* He further states, *"I cannot understand how any reformed man can ever teach anything different."* Rev. Herman Hoeksema asks, *"Do you think God used any word of man when He created the world? Neither does He use the preaching of a man in regeneration. It is other worldly."* I assure you; you will hear in the beginning 5 minutes already of that sermon a fierce opposition to what Rev. Lanning is now teaching. Your heart will sing when you hear the truth taught by Rev. Herman Hoeksema over against the lie. The Living and abiding Word of Christ is not dependent upon some preacher who has an overinflated sense of his own self-importance, nor is the salvation of the elect dependent upon a church. *It's the other way around.* Both the preaching and the work of the church are dependent upon the Living and Abiding Word of Christ. The WORD does not need a preacher or a church, but the church and the preaching needs the WORD and has no reason to exist without the WORD. Does not Rev. Lanning understand that he can preach till he's blue in the face but Rev. Lanning and the preaching of FRPC has never saved anyone nor will they save anyone? Rev. Lanning forgets that no man can even hear Christ in the preaching of the gospel unless that man is already saved and has been given the gift of faith. The preacher nor the Church saves, Christ alone saves! Two people can sit in the same pew, brothers perhaps, one is saved and one is not. Do you think the preaching they both hear saves one and not the other?

Christ alone saves, and Christ alone hardens. That cannot be emphasized enough especially today where preachers no longer understand, whether out of ignorance or out of pride, that the Living and Abiding Word of Christ does not need a preacher or a Church to save His own nor do they understand any longer what faith is. The Spirit of Christ may choose to operate *with* the preaching but is not limited to work *through* the preaching. That distinction was made by the Reformed long ago over against the teaching of the Lutherans. Nor is that the teaching of independen-tism as claims Rev. Lanning, but that of the Reformed Truth itself. The preacher and the Church are totally help-less to save without Christ, are not needed by Him, and are used by Him simply as a means He is pleased to use to feed His lambs and strengthen the faith He has already given His own elect. The preaching of the gospel does not, ***emphatically does not, create faith***, contrary to the teach-ings of Rev. Lanning. The Spirit of Christ alone can give the gift of faith. Faithful preaching can only strengthen the faith that has already been given the elect as His gift. The preacher and the earthly form of a church are nothing apart from Christ. Nothing at all! Christ is everything and man is nothing! That is the Reformed faith! Rev. Lanning seeks to make your salvation dependent upon his preach-ing and that of FRPC and not on Christ alone. He does this by making his preaching and the church's role the emphasis and focal point of salvation instead of the Liv-ing and Abiding Word of Christ. Rev. Lanning would rob Christ of His glory. Rev. Lanning seeks to lead his con-gregation right into the arms of Rome and it's teaching of salvation in relationship to the church when it comes right down to it.

Rev. Lanning says in his sermon that to say that the WORD does not need the Church is to separate salvation from the means of salvation. This is a serious accusation, extremely dangerous, false, and deceptive because at first glance it has the appearance of truth. It is the devil's own lie. Rev. Lanning in that sermon makes Christ's work dependent upon a man's preaching. Furthermore, it is not the truth as it is evident that Rev. Lanning's teaching has no answer for the salvation of infants or young children who die in infancy. Rev. Lanning's teaching is in essence the same as Rev. Koole's in that it makes salvation conditional. Rev. Lanning makes hearing the preaching as taught by him and being a member of FRPC a condition of salvation. It's the lie through and through again repeating itself in a matter of less than two years just in different form. The WORD alone saves! That has been the battle cry of the Reformed and that is the truth as it has triumphed through history conquering all that opposes the Truth. Rev. Lanning stands in direct opposition to that Truth.

As I began to point out Rev. Lanning's teaching is false

because it has no answer to the salvation of infants or to the parents whose infants die in infancy, but in contrast the Reformed Faith does. He cannot, for he has stated plainly and by implication and that not so subtle that there is no salvation outside of hearing his preaching and being a member of RPC. ***In direct opposition Rev. Hoeksema cor-rectly points out in his sermon on Baptism and Regeneration that infants do not understand the preaching, nor can they discern what is being preached to them.*** As the Baptism Form states so beautifully under Head I, first paragraph, "for as they are *without their knowledge* (young children, emphasis mine HDB) partakers of the condemnation in Adam, ***so are they again*** (that is without their knowledge, emphasis mine HDB) ***received unto grace in Christ...***" The only correct view is to understand the Reformed view that the Living and Abiding Word of Christ normally saves the elect infants of believing parents without the aid of the preaching of the gospel. ***Rev. Hoeksema points out cor-rectly that the Reformed teach that the elect infants of believers who die in infancy are saved and go to glory with-out the means of preaching.*** Furthermore, as evidence to that truth, Rev. Hoeksema points out that most teenagers when making confession of faith cannot point to the day of their regeneration and being brought to faith in Christ. Rev. Lanning does not teach the Reformed Faith but an-other teaching of his own imagination. His teaching is es-sentially the same as Rome's.

It is interesting to note that both Rev. Koole and Rev. Lanning both stumble headlong over the truth that Rev. Herman Hoeksema was trying to drive home with his ser-mon on the Philippian jailor. In the Philippian jailor we are now talking about the salvation of adults. It was over this sermon where the controversy all started. If there was one thing Rev. H.H. was trying to drive home in that sermon it was the truth that the Philippian jailor was regenerated and saved without the preaching of the gospel. The physi-cal earthquake was only a symbol of the supernatural work of the Spirit of Christ that was happening in the heart of the Philippian jailor. The lie always opposes the Truth. So, Rev. Lanning takes great offense to the truth that the Re-formed has always loved, that is, the WORD is not depen-dent upon man, even a preacher or a church. The Word may work with the preaching but is not bound by it. It is a Reformed doctrinal truth that abases man and extols Christ and His perfect work alone. It is the doctrine that makes man nothing and Christ everything. Natural man and the carnal preacher hate that Truth.

The truth is never a weapon of tyranny, true enough, but false teachers are always tyrants. False teachers always seek to usurp the authority of Christ in His Church, claim it for their own and produce tyranny in the Church. They trouble the church on every side. The dictatorship and doctrines

of men scatter and destroy the sheep, not the Truth. True sheep of Christ in the FRPC are bleeding, wounded and scattered. Many I hear of who weep not knowing where to go anymore. The Great Shepard who loves His lambs will not tolerate this for long. Demand of your minister that the Truth and nothing but the whole Truth be taught off your pulpit and if he refuses show him the door straightway. Perhaps the Spirit of Christ will spare and restore.

The Spirit of Christ always points to and promotes Christ and Christ alone. We say that the Spirit is self-effacing. A faithful preacher of the gospel will always have the same attitude of John the Baptist. He must increase but I must decrease. What did you hear in that sermon and others of Rev. Lanning? Did you hear Christ alone saves and is pleased to use weakest means to strengthen the faith of His own? Or did you hear, Christ plus the preaching of a man and membership in this church alone saves? Or the ultimate worst, The preaching of a man and membership in this church alone saves? If you heard anything but the first you have reason for great concern. Rev. Lanning extols the means Christ is pleased to use to strengthen the faith of His own over above

the work of Christ in salvation itself. Christ commands His church to try the Spirits. He commended the Bereans as noble for they put their preacher to the test of the word of God and mind you the man whose words they were putting to the test were none else than the greatest of the apostles. Rev. Lanning is not greater than the apostle Paul.

If your minister will not hear the Truth, then show him the door straightway. In the context of christian discipline and in direct opposition to Rev. Lanning's teaching, Christ declares plainly in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." You may not have a preacher or even an instituted church, but the living and abiding WORD promises you He will be in your midst. The WORD is not bound by a preacher or a church.

I encourage you to listen to Rev. Herman Hoeksema's sermon on Baptism and Regeneration to hear the Truth in opposition to the lie being taught in your midst. The Truth alone will set you free. Let no man take your crown.

—Herman Boonstra
Loveland Colorado

RESPONSE

Introduction

The above letter comes from the pen of one of the founding members of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP). I also am a founding member of RBP, but let's just say that our correspondent and I long ago parted ways. Our correspondent alleges that I am not Reformed and, in fact, that I am a false prophet who mocks Christ by my doctrine.

I deny our correspondent's allegations, and I maintain that our correspondent is not Reformed. He, of course, would deny this, and then I would deny his denial, and this would go on without end. I suppose that Herman Boonstra and I could hammer back and forth at each other all spring and summer about who is Reformed and who is not, but I don't see much profit in that for the readership of *Sword and Shield*. In fact, I strongly considered not publishing his letter because I see it as empty grandstanding by an enemy of the gospel. *Sword and Shield* has published its fair share about roosters, but that does not mean that its pages are a yard where a man should strut around and preen his feathers.

I do, however, see profit in addressing the doctrinal issue that the letter raises. This doctrinal issue has played a significant role in the recent withdrawal of several members from the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). Because of the doctrinal matter, then, our correspondent's letter and this reply are printed.

The Doctrinal Issue

The doctrinal issue is this: Is God pleased to use the preaching of the gospel to save his people, or is God pleased to save his people without the preaching of the gospel?

The reader will have to keep in mind that this is the issue. The issue is not whether God *could* save his people without the preaching of the gospel. We are not dealing with a question of God's omnipotent ability but with a question of God's will. Besides, scripture and the confessions are not interested in hypothetical questions in salvation, but they are very interested in what God has revealed as his actual power and good pleasure in salvation. Nor is the issue whether Christ himself personally saves the elect sinner. (Yes, he does.) Nor is the issue whether the Holy Spirit sovereignly creates faith. (Yes, he does.) Nor is the issue whether the minister himself personally saves the elect sinner by his preaching. (No, he does not.) Nor is the issue whether the preaching of the gospel operates independently of God in salvation. (No, it does not.) Nor is the issue whether the Word of God depends upon the church. (No, it does not.) Nor is the issue whether the church depends upon the Word of God. (Yes, it does.)

Any suggestion that these other things are the issue is only a loud attempt to pick a fight where there is no fight. There certainly is a fight to be had. But let us fight where

there is a doctrinal difference between us. That doctrinal difference is over this question: Is God pleased to use the preaching of the gospel to save his people, or is God pleased to save his people without the preaching of the gospel?

God Saves through Preaching

The Reformed faith is that God is pleased to use the preaching of the gospel to save his people. This is not because there is any power in the man who preaches but only because God makes the preaching his instrument by which he bestows salvation. The preaching of the gospel is God's means by which he calls the elect sinner out of darkness into God's marvelous light. It is God's means by which he declares to the elect sinner the fullness of God's promise in Christ. It is God's means by which the Holy Ghost works faith in the hearts of the elect. It is God's means by which he feeds and nourishes the elect sinner with the bread of life unto everlasting life.

The Reformed faith further teaches that God is not pleased to save his people without the preaching of the gospel. Although God makes himself known to all men through the creation, so that they know that there is a God and that he is to be worshiped, God does not translate men out of their sin and death and misery by his revelation of himself in the creation. Men are rendered without excuse by what they know of God in the creation, but they are not delivered from their sin. Only by the preaching of the gospel does God deliver men from darkness to light because only the preaching of the gospel declares the good news of salvation in Christ.

The Reformed faith further teaches that neither the minister of the gospel nor the members of the church may try to separate salvation from the preaching of the gospel, as if God's people can have salvation without preaching. God himself in his good pleasure has joined salvation and preaching together, and man may not tempt God by trying to separate what he has intimately joined. In fact, so closely is salvation joined to the preaching of the gospel by God's ordinance that the more the church preaches the pure gospel of salvation, the more the church enjoys the blessings of her salvation. This "more" is not due to any faithfulness or goodness on the part of man, whether minister or congregant, but this "more" is due to the power of the gospel by which God saves his people.

The Reformed confessions are explicit that God is pleased to use the preaching of the gospel to save his people and that God is not pleased to save his people without the preaching of the gospel.

The Holy Ghost works faith by the preaching of the gospel.

Q. 65. Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by faith only, whence doth this faith proceed?

A. From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and confirms it by the use of the sacraments. (Lord's Day 25, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 108)

The Holy Ghost bestows Christ and his salvation upon us through the preaching of the gospel.

Q. 67. Are both Word and sacraments, then, ordained and appointed for this end, that they may direct our faith to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Yes, indeed; for the Holy Ghost teaches us in the gospel, and assures us by the sacraments, that the whole of our salvation depends upon that one sacrifice of Christ which He offered for us on the cross. (Lord's Day 25, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 108)

God opens the kingdom of heaven to his elect people by the preaching of the gospel.

Q. 83. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

A. The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers. (Lord's Day 31, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 118)

God saves by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel.

What therefore neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word or ministry of reconciliation, which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old as under the New Testament. (Canons of Dort 3–4.6, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 167)

And then there is Canons 3–4.17, which forbids the separation of salvation from the preaching of the gospel, as if believers can have salvation without the means of preaching that God has ordained. Remember that the line in this article that reads, "Grace is conferred by means of admonitions" means "Grace is conferred by means of the gospel."¹

1 See Andrew Lanning, "Canons 3–4.17: 'Grace is Conferred by Means of Admonitions,'" *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 4 (September 2022): 8–18.

As the almighty operation of God whereby He prolongs and supports this our natural life does not exclude, but requires, the use of means, by which God of His infinite mercy and goodness hath chosen to exert His influence, so also the before mentioned supernatural operation of God by which we are regenerated in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul. Wherefore, as the apostles and teachers who succeeded them piously instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to His glory, and the abatement of all pride, and in the meantime, however, neglected not to keep them by the sacred precepts of the gospel in the exercise of the Word, sacraments, and discipline; so, even to this day, be it far from either instructors or instructed to presume to tempt God in the church by separating what He of His good pleasure hath most intimately joined together. For grace is conferred by means of admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us, and the more directly is His work advanced; to whom alone all the glory, both of means and of their saving fruit and efficacy, is forever due. Amen. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 170)

The confessions teach that God is pleased to save his people by the preaching of the gospel because this is the doctrine of scripture.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:16)

13. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
14. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?
15. And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!
16. But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?
17. So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom. 10:13–17)

On the basis of the word of God, the Reformed faith teaches that God is pleased to save his elect people by the preaching of the gospel and that he is not pleased to save his people apart from the preaching of the gospel in the true church institute.

Salvation Supposedly without Preaching

Correspondent Boonstra takes a different position than the confessions. He teaches that God saves his elect people apart from the preaching of the gospel. He teaches that God does not work faith by the preaching of the gospel. Our correspondent will allow the Holy Spirit to operate with the preaching if the Spirit wants to, and our correspondent will allow the preaching of the gospel to strengthen faith that has already been bestowed. But our correspondent emphatically denies that the Spirit creates faith by the preaching of the gospel, and he emphatically denies that God saves his people by means of the preaching.

Here is our correspondent:

The preaching of the gospel does not, ***emphatically does not, create faith***, contrary to the teachings of Rev. Lanning. The Spirit of Christ alone can give the gift of faith. Faithful preaching can only strengthen the faith that has already been given the elect as His gift. (The emphasis is Boonstra's.)

Remember the issue. The issue is not whether the Holy Ghost *could* work faith apart from the preaching. The issue is not whether the Holy Ghost himself personally works faith. The issue is not whether the minister or church creates faith. Rather, the issue is whether the Holy Ghost saves his people, including working faith in them, by the preaching of the word. The confessions say that he does: “The Holy Ghost...works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel” (Lord’s Day 25, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 108). The scriptures say that he does: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Herman Boonstra says that he does not:

The preaching of the gospel does not, ***emphatically does not, create faith***, contrary to the teachings of Rev. Lanning. The Spirit of Christ alone can give the gift of faith. Faithful preaching can only strengthen the faith that has already been given the elect as His gift.

Our correspondent tries to maintain his teaching on the basis of the distinction between “the Living and abiding Word of Christ,” on the one hand, and the “preaching of the gospel,” on the other hand. Although our correspondent does not explain exactly what he means by this

distinction, it is clear enough what he means from his references to 1 Peter 1:23–25 and the corresponding sermon by Herman Hoeksema. Our correspondent evidently is speaking of the biblical distinction between the second person of the Trinity as the living Word, come in our flesh, and the declaration and proclamation of that living Word in the preaching of the gospel. When Peter speaks in 1 Peter 1:23–25 of our being born again, he speaks of two “words.” One Word is an incorruptible seed. It is a Word that liveth and abideth for ever. It is a Word that endureth forever. That Word is the eternal Word, who was in the beginning with God and who is God (John 1:1–2). The other “word” in 1 Peter 1:23–25 is the preaching of the gospel. God accomplishes our regeneration by implanting the first Word, the living and eternal Word, in our hearts directly as the incorruptible seed of our lives. We know this Word, who has been implanted in our hearts, by the second word, the preaching of the gospel. For “this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (v. 25).

In his letter correspondent Boonstra makes much of the distinction between these two words. He writes often of “the distinction between the preaching of the Gospel and the Living and abiding Word of Christ.” In fact, I think it is fair to say that this distinction is the foundation of Boonstra’s doctrine in his letter. His main doctrinal point is built on the fact that there is a distinction between the living and abiding Word of Christ, on the one hand, and the preaching of the gospel, on the other hand.

Our correspondent is correct that there is a distinction between the living and eternal Word, on the one hand, and the preaching of that Word, on the other hand. But Boonstra is grievously mistaken in how he uses that distinction. He uses the distinction to *separate* the living Word and the preaching of the gospel. The point at which he separates the living Word from the preaching is the salvation of the sinner. For Boonstra the salvation of the sinner is accomplished by the living Word but without the preaching of the gospel. For Boonstra God gives the elect sinner the gift of faith by the living Word but without the preaching of the gospel. The most that Boonstra will allow the preaching in salvation is that “the Spirit of Christ may choose to operate with the preaching but is not limited to work through the preaching.” The most that Boonstra will allow the preaching in salvation is that it can strengthen faith but not that it is God’s power by which he creates faith.

The preaching of the gospel does not, *emphatically does not, create faith*, contrary to the teachings of Rev. Lanning. The Spirit of Christ alone can give the gift of faith. Faithful preaching

can only strengthen the faith that has already been given the elect as His gift.

Our correspondent insists that the preaching of the gospel be excluded from salvation. So insistent is he that he made the exclusion of the preaching from salvation the title of his letter: “The Living and Abiding Word of Christ Alone, Saves.” By the word “alone” in his title, Boonstra excludes preaching from salvation. If our correspondent were simply teaching that preaching does not operate as an independent power from God, he would be correct. If he were simply teaching that Christ and his Spirit do the actual work of salvation and that preaching is the means by which Christ and the Spirit are pleased to work, he would be correct. But this is not Boonstra’s teaching. His teaching is that the living Word and the preaching must be distinguished so that the preaching can be excluded from salvation. I believe it is a fair interpretation of the word “alone” in our correspondent’s title to read it this way: “The Living and Abiding Word of Christ [without Preaching], Saves.”

Boonstra’s stand is contrary to the Reformed confessions. When he separates the living Word from the preaching of the gospel in order to exclude the preaching of the gospel from salvation, he does what the confessions forbid.

As the almighty operation of God whereby He prolongs and supports this our natural life does not exclude, but requires, the use of means, by which God of His infinite mercy and goodness hath chosen to exert His influence, so also the before mentioned supernatural operation of God by which we are regenerated in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul... Be it far from either instructors or instructed to presume to tempt God in the church by separating what He of His good pleasure hath most intimately joined together. (Canons 3–4.17, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 170)

Bizarre Charges

Correspondent Boonstra’s position leads him to make bizarre charges against me for my position that God is pleased to save his people by the preaching of the gospel and that he is not pleased to save his people apart from the preaching of the gospel.

First, Boonstra charges me as being “some preacher who has an overinflated sense of his own self-importance” and many like things. I am certainly capable of such pride, but that is not why I believe what I do about the

preaching. Let me put it personally. I believe that God uses my preaching of the gospel to save his people and that God is not pleased to save his people apart from such preaching of the gospel. This has nothing whatsoever to do with me but has only to do with what God says about preaching. God says that it is his power to save (Rom. 1:16). God says that faithful preaching of the gospel is not the word of man but the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). God says that faithful preaching of the gospel is Jesus himself speaking to his sheep by his own voice (John 10:27). When I insist that members of the congregation listen to my preaching, heed my preaching, receive my preaching, believe my preaching, submit to my preaching, obey my preaching, and not leave my preaching for another gospel, none of that has anything to do with the “my” but has everything to do with the “preaching.” The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation, so I must insist that both I and the congregation heed my preaching.

Second, Boonstra charges me with making Christ, or the living and abiding Word of Christ, to depend on men.

The WORD does not need a preacher or a church, but the church and the preaching needs the WORD and has no reason to exist without the WORD. Does not Rev. Lanning understand that he can preach till he’s blue in the face but Rev. Lanning and the preaching of FRPC has never saved anyone nor will they save anyone?

And again,

Rev. Lanning seeks to make your salvation dependent upon his preaching and that of FRPC and not on Christ alone. He does this by making his preaching and the church’s role the emphasis and focal point of salvation instead of the Living and Abiding Word of Christ. Rev. Lanning would rob Christ of His glory. Rev. Lanning seeks to lead his congregation right into the arms of Rome and it’s teaching of salvation in relationship to the church when it comes right down to it.

Again, remember the issue. The issue is not whether God *is able* to save apart from the preaching. The issue is not whether the living Word *needs* a preacher or a church. Boonstra confuses the issue when he tries to make it a matter of God’s *ability* to save his people without preaching. Boonstra confuses the issue when he tries to turn an elevation of preaching into a threat to the power of the living and abiding Word of Christ. Rather than this confusion, the issue is whether God is *pleased* to save his people by preaching. What does God say his pleasure is? “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). This is no threat whatsoever

to the power or ability of the living and abiding Word of Christ. It is no denial whatsoever that the church depends upon the Word and not the other way around. It is simply the truth that God saves by the preaching of the cross so that his foolishness is shown to be wiser than men and his weakness is shown to be stronger than men. Now let not Herm Boonstra or anyone else try to separate what it has pleased God to join together.

Third, Boonstra charges me with teaching the same conditional salvation as Reverend Koole and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

Rev. Lanning’s teaching is in essence the same as Rev. Koole’s in that it makes salvation conditional. Rev. Lanning makes hearing the preaching as taught by him and being a member of FRPC a condition of salvation.

In this charge Boonstra is still dealing with the main point of his letter, which is that the living Word saves apart from the preaching of the gospel. Boonstra camouflages his charge a bit here. He makes it sound like he is merely opposing the preaching of a particular man or membership in a particular institute. But for all of that camouflage, Boonstra is not talking about a particular man or a particular institute. He is talking about preaching the gospel. He asserts again in this context, “The WORD alone saves!” where “alone” means *without preaching*.

With this charge Boonstra reveals how deep is his opposition to the Reformed doctrine of preaching. He calls the Reformed doctrine of preaching a conditional doctrine. He equates the Reformed doctrine of preaching with Reverend Koole’s doctrine that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do. The truth of the matter is that the preaching of the gospel is God’s power of salvation exactly because it is not man’s doing but God’s. God operates in preaching (1 Cor. 1:18). Christ speaks in preaching (Eph. 4:20–21). The Holy Ghost teaches in preaching (1 Cor. 2:13). And by this preaching—God-operating, Christ-speaking, and Holy-Ghost-teaching—God saves his people.

Now let Herman Boonstra stop damning the preaching at First Reformed Protestant Church as if it were a matter of some boastful preacher’s trying to subject both men and the living Word to himself. In the pulpit there certainly is a weak preacher, whose words sound foolish to men. But God saves his people by this weak man’s preaching so that the faith of God’s people may not stand in men but in the power of God.

3. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.
4. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

5. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:3–5)

And let Herman Boonstra take heed that when he sets himself against preaching as God's power of salvation, he is not merely opposing this minister or that minister but God himself. "Be it far from either instructors or instructed to presume to tempt God in the church by separating what He of His good pleasure hath most intimately joined together" (Canons 3–4.17, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 170).

Immediate Regeneration

I found the most interesting part of our correspondent's letter to be his appeal to the doctrine of immediate regeneration. The doctrine of immediate regeneration is that God regenerates a man without the use of the means of preaching. Whereas God bestows all of the other gifts of salvation by means of the preaching, God bestows this one gift of regeneration directly and without means. The word *immediate* in *immediate regeneration* means *without means*. The other possibility for regeneration would be mediate regeneration, which is that God uses the means of the preaching of the gospel to regenerate his elect people, just as he uses the means of preaching to bestow all of the other gifts of salvation.

Although the doctrine of immediate regeneration is not binding on a Reformed church because it is not demanded by the Reformed confessions, it has been the unofficial position of the Protestant Reformed Churches by virtue of Herman Hoeksema's firm conviction. In strong language Hoeksema taught immediate regeneration. Our correspondent quotes from a sermon of Hoeksema on 1 Peter 1:23–25 that demonstrates the point: "Do you think God used any word of man when He created the world? Neither does He use the preaching of a man in regeneration. It is other worldly." I take our correspondent at his word that he has faithfully quoted Hoeksema in that passage. Because of Hoeksema's firm conviction, I suppose that the Reformed Protestant Churches have carried the doctrine of immediate regeneration with them out of the PRC, so that immediate regeneration is also the unofficial position of the RPC. However, until such time as it is shown to be a confessional matter, there is room in the RPC for a man to be undecided on the issue or even to hold to mediate regeneration.

But for now let us agree with Herman Hoeksema that regeneration is immediate, such that God accomplishes the regeneration of his people by directly implanting

the living and abiding Word in their hearts without the preaching of the gospel.

Correspondent Boonstra thinks that he has found proof in the doctrine of immediate regeneration for his position that God saves his people without the preaching of the gospel. The logic of his proof is this: God regenerates his people without the preaching of the gospel; therefore, God saves his people without the preaching of the gospel. Boonstra states his position thus:

The teachings of Rev. Herman Hoeksema and the truth which I believe with all my heart stand in direct opposition to Rev. Lanning. For one of the best explanations anywhere to be found on the distinction between the Living and Abiding Word of Christ and the preaching of a man, listen to Rev. Herman Hoeksema's sermon on Baptism and Regeneration on I Peter 1:23–25 as recorded for us on Old Paths Recordings.

Boonstra is using the doctrine of immediate regeneration to exclude preaching from salvation. It is this appeal to immediate regeneration that leads him to proclaim, "The Living and Abiding Word of Christ Alone [without Preaching], Saves."

Boonstra's error is that he makes the *immediate* in *immediate regeneration* apply also to all of the other gifts of salvation. He does not realize that regeneration is a special case. He thinks that Hoeksema's insistence that God does not "use the preaching of a man in regeneration" means that Hoeksema also taught that the living and abiding Word of Christ saves without the means of the preaching of the gospel by a man. Boonstra leaps from the doctrine of immediate regeneration to the heresy of immediate salvation.

Even the most ardent defender of immediate regeneration recognizes that regeneration is a special case. God's manner of operation in regeneration—immediate—is not his manner of operation in every other blessing of salvation—mediate. For example, Herman Hoeksema distinguished between regeneration as immediate and the rest of salvation as mediate. After teaching that the preaching of the word is the primary means of grace, Hoeksema wrote,

Here we may ask the question, Is all grace, as it is applied to the elect and wrought in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, mediate? Does the Holy Spirit always work through the means of the preaching of the word and of the sacraments, or is the very first beginning of God's marvelous work of grace an immediate work of the Holy Spirit?²

2 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd edition (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:295.

For Hoeksema regeneration was a special case. When he insisted that the Holy Ghost accomplishes regeneration without the use of the means of the preaching of the gospel, he never meant that the Holy Ghost accomplishes all of salvation without the use of the means of the preaching of the gospel. In fact, Hoeksema called the preaching of the gospel “indispensable” for salvation. When he wrote of the relationship between preaching and the sacraments, he taught:

The Christian, if need be, can live without the sacraments; but never can he live without the preaching of the word. Without the word of God, he cannot come to a conscious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has no knowledge of Christ and cannot appropriate him by a true and living faith. Through the preaching of the word the Holy Spirit works faith in the believer’s heart. Besides, the preaching of the word is not only the means by which the Holy Spirit works faith in him, but it is also the main means for the strengthening, upbuilding, and sustaining of his faith.³

Why is regeneration a special case? Because God’s elect child must be made alive before he can hear.

It must very definitely be maintained that regeneration is the very first work in the heart of the sinner, and that there can be no saving hearing of the word of God without this regeneration of the heart.⁴

Having regenerated his elect child, God then brings that life to consciousness and manifestation through the preaching of the gospel.

Even as the sustenance of our natural life requires means, so also the new life, which is immediately created in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, requires the means of the preaching of the gospel in order to cause the seed of regeneration to flourish into a conscious faith in Christ, to sustain, strengthen, and nourish it.⁵

Why else is regeneration a special case for Hoeksema? Because it accounts for the regeneration of infants who cannot consciously understand the preaching of the gospel.

Because we believe on the basis of Scripture that regeneration must be conceived as an immediate

work of the Spirit, and because for that very reason the regeneration of infants is possible, we regard it as a common rule that in the line of the covenant the elect children are reborn from infancy.⁶

Immediate regeneration is a special case. Not recognizing this, correspondent Boonstra has done with immediate regeneration what may not be done. He has used it—abused it—to exclude the preaching of the gospel from salvation. In this he has not only departed from Herman Hoeksema but from the Reformed confessions and scripture.

Here is Boonstra: “The Living and Abiding Word of Christ [without Preaching], Saves.”

Here is the truth:

The before mentioned supernatural operation of God by which we are regenerated in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul. (Canons 3–4.17, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 170)

Outside of the True Church Institute There Is No Salvation

There is a reason that our correspondent assaults the Reformed doctrine of preaching. The reason is that the preaching of the gospel happens within the true church institute and not outside of it. Our correspondent’s entire letter about preaching is really aimed against membership in the church institute. The Reformed faith teaches that because the preaching of the gospel is God’s means of salvation, there is no salvation outside of the true church institute. Those who withdraw from the church and live in a separate state from the church act contrary to the ordinance of God. Those who withdraw from the true church institute and keep themselves separate from it are not saved but are damned. This is the explicit doctrine of Belgic Confession 28.

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... Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join

3 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:284.

4 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:36.

5 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:298.

6 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:309.

themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 60–61)

But our correspondent is an enemy of the church institute. His doctrine, contrary to article 28 of the Belgic Confession, is that a man does not need to belong to a local church institute. His call to anyone in First Reformed Protestant Church who will listen is that he or she should leave the church, not in order to form a true church institute through reformation but to live outside of the church institute. His assurance to those who leave is that living separate from the church is not contrary to the ordinance of God, for they can be sure that the living and abiding Word (without preaching) will be in their midst.

Our correspondent takes aim at the church institute by the phrase “The WORD does not need the Church.”

Our correspondent learned this phrase from a post on Rev. Martin VanderWal’s blog, which blog our correspondent references in his letter. In a series of posts on his blog, Reverend VanderWal undermined the necessity of membership in a true local church.⁷ At the time there were several members of the Reformed Protes-

tant Churches who were grunting dissonantly about the decision of the September 2022 classis regarding Christian schools. Some of these disgruntled members left their Reformed Protestant churches and fellowships in order to visit United Reformed churches or Orthodox Presbyterian churches or to sit in their living rooms on Sundays, live-streaming who knows what. In spite of their disobedience to the fourth commandment (“that I...diligently frequent the church of God” [Lord’s Day 38]) and their unlawful separation from the church (“no person, of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it” [Belgic Confession 28]), Reverend VanderWal’s blog posts assured these people that God blesses those who live outside the local church institute. That Reverend VanderWal intended to confirm these people in their separation from the church institute became evident at the most recent classis. During his Formula of Subscription examination, Reverend VanderWal refused to acknowledge that he must admonish these people for living outside of the church institute but repeatedly left

What is it, really, that our correspondent is arguing? It is this: “The WORD does not need the Church,” so neither do you.

it to the conscience of each person whether he or she would be a member of the church or not.

In the blog posts one of the key lines that undermined the necessity of church membership was, as quoted by our correspondent, “The WORD does not need the Church.” Our correspondent takes up that line as if it is a profound statement about the sovereignty of God in salvation. Our correspondent damns any objection to that line as making the living Word to depend upon man.

Today I take up pen and paper to address the heresy that Rev. Lanning is now teaching in FRPC in his response to a blog post writer who wrote, “The WORD does not need the Church.” (See Rev. Lanning’s response in his sermon on the Means of Faith 11/6/22 pm) By this statement the blog post writer obviously is refer-

ring to the Living and abiding Word of Christ in distinction from the preaching of the gospel. Whether or not that is exactly what he meant this statement is soundly Reformed and Biblical. Yet Rev. Lanning shows either his profound ignorance of this reformed

truth or his willing malicious intent against it when it comes to the doctrines of regeneration, calling and that of the Living and abiding Word of Christ in distinction from the preaching of the gospel in salvation, by scoffing and ridiculing that statement. The blog writer speaks the truth, Rev. Lanning speaks the lie. Rev. Lanning not only ridicules that statement but worse yet minimizes and mocks the Living Word of Christ and therefore Christ Himself in that sermon. It’s that serious.

The problem with the line “The WORD does not need the Church” is not that the line is untrue in itself. If we are talking about who needs whom, then the church needs the Word. If we are talking about the inherent power of the living and abiding Word to accomplish all of God’s purpose, then the Word does not need the church. The problem with the line is that we are not talking about whether the living and abiding Word has inherent power. We are talking about church membership. We are talking

⁷ Martin VanderWal, “Covenant and Grace.” The six-part blog series began October 20, 2022 (<https://notallpiousandeclesiastical.wordpress.com/2022/10/20/covenant-and-grace/>), and ended November 25, 2022 (<https://notallpiousandeclesiastical.wordpress.com/2022/11/25/covenant-and-grace-6/>).

about whether “Every One Is Bound to Join Himself to the True Church” (title of Belgic Confession 28, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 60). The line in question was put to use both by the blog writer and by our correspondent to deny that everyone *must* be a member of a true local church institute.

Our correspondent denies the necessity of church membership, including the necessity of hearing the preaching of the gospel, by attacking a particular preacher and a particular church institute. However, understand as you read that our correspondent is not merely aiming at a particular church institute but at the very idea of membership in a church institute. “Rev. Lanning seeks to make your salvation dependent upon his preaching and that of FRPC and not on Christ alone.” Again: “Rev. Lanning makes hearing the preaching as taught by him and being a member of FRPC a condition of salvation.” Again: “He has stated plainly and by implication and that not so subtle that there is no salvation outside of hearing his preaching and being a member of RPC.”

Here is our correspondent’s point as the conclusion of his letter:

You may not have a preacher or even an instituted church, but the living and abiding WORD promises you He will be in your midst. The WORD is not bound by a preacher or a church.

There is the point! Our correspondent does not make so much of the living and abiding Word in order to honor the Word but in order to separate that Word from church membership. What is it, really, that our correspondent is arguing? It is this: “The WORD does not need the Church,” so neither do you.

All of the talk about the Word not being bound and the Word not needing the church and the Word not needing a preacher and the Word not depending on the church is pressed to this one conclusion: the believer does not need the church or the preaching, for the believer has the Word without the church or the preaching. Our correspondent’s whole point is to oppose the necessity of church membership. His whole point is that because the Word does not need the church, the believer does not need the church. Because the Word does not need the church, your family does not need the church. Because the Word does not need the church, you can have the Word outside of the church. Because the living and abiding Word does not need the church to preach it, you can leave the church and the preaching and still have the Word.

Our correspondent’s appeal to Matthew 18:20 does not prove his point. His appeal only proves that every

heretic has his text. When Jesus promised his disciples, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,” he was not saying, “The Word does not need the church, and neither do you.” As if Christ were indifferent to whether his elect people would be members of his bride or not! As if Christ were leaving it to a man’s conscience whether that man would join the manifestation of Christ’s body on earth or not! In Matthew 18:20 Jesus was speaking of elders who would make a judgment about the Christian discipline of a member. Where there is an instituted church with a consistory composed of only two or three elders, there is Christ in the midst of them.

18. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
19. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.
20. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matt. 18:18–20)

Correspondent Boonstra’s doctrine, which he borrows from the aforementioned blog, has had an effect in the Reformed Protestant Churches. The effect has been the departure of several families and individuals from the Reformed Protestant Churches. These families and individuals are not members of any church. Many of them are open to the possibility of joining the United Reformed Churches or the Orthodox Presbyterian Church or who knows what else. But most of them, as of this writing, are not under the oversight of any consistory. They have withdrawn and separated from the church and have not reformed a church institute but sit in their living rooms outside of the church.

By way of contrast, and without a hint of boasting, when the Reformed Protestant Churches had to reform by separating from the Protestant Reformed Churches, it was unthinkable to us that we should become United Reformed, Orthodox Presbyterian, or anything else. Would the truth of the gospel matter so little to us that we would join ourselves to the well-meant offer of the gospel, the conditional covenant, divorce and remarriage, and evolution, just to name a few gross heresies? And when small fellowships of Reformed Protestant people did form, they quickly appealed for oversight to neighboring Reformed Protestant churches until they could be instituted in their own right. The organization of fellowships

and churches was characterized by orderliness, and there was never an attempt to undermine church membership in a true church institute. I don't say this to any praise of myself or the RPC, for I am full of all manner of folly. If the Lord had left us to our own devices, we undoubtedly would have sought our own way. But God mercifully gathered his church by his Word and Spirit, and he did so according to the Spirit's orderly operation of gathering church institutes, and church fellowships under the oversight of church institutes. I say this so that no one who has left the RPC can say that he or she is just doing what we did in the formation of the RPC. What is going on right now among those who are leaving the RPC is far different, for there is no regard for truth, and there is no regard for order.

Over against our correspondent and those who are of his mind stands the confessional demand for church membership. Let all those who have withdrawn from the institute into nothing take heed that they act contrary to the ordinance of God and that outside of the true church institute there is no salvation. Let them repent and return to membership in the church.

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 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)

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. — 1 Thessalonians 5:24

All of our salvation is of the Lord. All of our salvation is of his grace. He is faithful to perform it and to present his people without spot or wrinkle in the assembly of the elect in life eternal. Such is the thought of the apostle in this verse.

God is faithful.

God is faithful in himself. He does not change. He is the same in all the fullness and glory of his divine being from eternity to eternity. He is the same in all his perfections from eternity to eternity. He is from eternity to eternity devoted to the glory of his holy name.

God is faithful.

God is faithful to his promise. Before the world began he made the promise to save his people from their sins and to give them eternal life with him in his covenant in glory for the glory of his holy name. That promise he revealed in the garden of Eden. That promise he fulfilled in the coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the great revelation that God is faithful. God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for his people to establish their salvation on the foundation of Christ's perfect righteousness. And God raised up Jesus from the dead and set him at God's right hand, and from there Jesus will come to judge the quick and the dead.

God is faithful.

God is faithful who calls you. You were conceived dead in trespasses and sins, by nature far from God and from his covenant. Spiritually, you were one with the world. Yet you were engraved upon the palms of God's hands from all eternity, and you were the apple of his eye. And he called you according to his eternal purpose. He addressed you with his powerful and creative Word in the very depths of your being. He summoned you as light out of darkness, calling you out of darkness into his marvelous light. He made you alive and placed you in abiding communion with Jesus Christ. Yes, the God of peace sanctify you wholly! So that with that calling you are separated from the world and joined unto Christ in your whole life.

God is faithful.

God is faithful to the end. He did not call you for a day, for a week, for a month, or for a year. He called you forever. Faithful is he who calls. He called you at some time. When, I do not know. Likely, you do not know either. That is known unto God. Yet he ever speaks to you according to his eternal purpose. He speaks by his powerful and creative and sustaining word. He constantly calls to you so that his Word is the power of your salvation constantly every day to preserve you blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, he is faithful over against your frequent unfaithfulness. He is faithful over against all the assaults of the devil and the temptations of the world. He is faithful to preserve you unto everlasting life in heaven.

He will call once yet, and you will be brought home in your soul.

And at the time appointed, he will send Jesus Christ in his faithfulness. And then, yet again, he will call, and you will come out of your grave and be made perfect, body and soul, to enter into your eternal inheritance. He is faithful who calls you, and he will perform it.

—NJL