



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Third Annual Meeting Edition

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.
—Ephesians 4:14–15

It is a sad sight, a shipwreck! A total loss of the cargo. A few survivors plucked from the waters. Shipwreck in earthly life is devastating. Oftentimes, the result of negligence or incompetence on the part of the captain and the crew. But in things spiritual it is particularly sobering to behold a shipwreck. Did not the apostle warn about this in 1 Timothy 1:18–20?

18. This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;
19. Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:
20. Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Who were Hymenaeus and Alexander?

Maybe the men were friends of the apostle Paul. Perhaps they were his former students. Surely, they were fellow ministers at one time and former church members. Those men suffered shipwreck, and others followed. Yes, according to 2 Timothy 2:17, their words ate like a canker. Their words were false doctrine. The specific form of their false doctrine was that the resurrection was past. But they erred concerning the truth, so they are examples of all who depart from the words of sound doctrine. And they overthrew the faith of some. Their false words and evil doctrines ate in the churches and devoured many, who with them also made shipwreck concerning the faith.

Sobering sight it was to behold.

A warning to the church.

So also in Ephesians 4 there is a warning. Church history is littered with the shipwrecks of churches, denominations, and individuals who did not heed this warning of the apostle Paul. Perhaps when doctrinal controversy came to their churches, the false teachers even quoted these words of the apostle. Perhaps they preached a sermon about these words, exhorting the congregation to speak the truth in love. But they handled the word of God deceitfully and misused the word to denigrate, to silence, and to shame those who were speaking the truth

in love. They were like useless sailors aboard a ship who had neither the skill nor the willingness to keep the ship on course in a storm. Their ship was tossed to and fro on the mighty waves; and by the fierce and relentless winds of doctrine, the ship and all who were on it were shipwrecked on the rocks of apostasy. Or the false teachers were like the negligent captain, who drunkenly steered his ship onto the rocks; and the ship, crew, and passengers perished; so they, being drunken on man, smashed their ship on the shores of false doctrine.

Oh, it is certain that the church of Christ never comes to shipwreck. Whatever happens to this church or that church, to this denomination or that denomination, or to this individual or that individual, the church is never lost, and none of her members perish. She is the church of Christ! Like the ship in the fierce winds that troubled Galilee's waters, the church is absolutely safe with Christ. He brings her to the harbor: the unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That is heaven. Christ perfectly guides his church in every age to heaven through the raging storms, towering waves, and fierce winds of doctrine that blow. The gates of hell cannot prevail against Christ's church.

So the apostle tells the church to grow up into Christ. The church is safe with Christ. If a church departs from him, she cannot but end up shipwrecked. Approving of the error of common grace, within a few generations she will approve of sodomy. Approving of the false doctrine that displaces Christ, in a generation or two, she will join with the antichrist. She goes shipwreck, tossed on the winds and storms of doctrine that blow.

Grow up into Christ because there are fierce storms that constantly blow upon the church through the sea of time. The ship on the ocean observes clouds gathering ominously on the horizon, the winds pick up and begin to swirl, and the waves rise higher and higher. The ship is headed straight into a typhoon! It is time to prepare for a storm! On the sea of time, there are ferocious winds that constantly blow terrible storms that raise capsizing waves. Those winds are winds of doctrine. Winds of doctrine are not gentle zephyrs but are black storms of false doctrine. So it has always been for the church, and so it always will be.

Is it not true? In the Old Testament there were always the false prophets. There were more false prophets than true. Sometimes it was four hundred against one. What was true of the Old Testament continued in the New Testament. Already in the apostolic age, false teachers and false apostles crept into the church to privily bring in damnable heresies. They taught righteousness by faith and works, denied the resurrection of saints, and taught the church to live as the world, along with many other heresies. John said that many antichrists have gone out into the world!

The winds did not die down with the end of the apostolic age but continued blowing on down to the present age. There were those who tried to take Christ away from the church by denying his Godhead and those who denied that he was a truly righteous man, the seed of Mary and David. The winds of doctrine blew, denying the total depravity and utter wretchedness of the natural man. Whenever total depravity is under assault, behind that is always lurking the hurricane of denying the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation and the attempt for man to take some credit for salvation. So Pelagius came; later came Rome with her free will and works-righteousness; then came Erasmus to try to overthrow the Reformation; soon Sadoleto with his honeyed words attacked Geneva; and later the arch-heretic James Arminius sought to overthrow the Reformed faith. The *Afscheiding* was corrupted almost from the beginning by the introduction of conditional covenant theology, and common grace came to sweep away the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed church world. Federal vision sweeps like a violent storm through Reformed denominations, destroying churches and making shipwreck the confession of many. We ourselves faced and are facing doctrinal winds as a denomination. These and many other winds are examples of the terrible storms of false doctrine that blow on the sea of history, through which the ship of the church must be steered by a sure hand toward her everlasting habitation and the safe harbor of heaven.

What makes these winds different from the winds of the creation is the devilishly clever way in which they come. The creation wind states its presence clearly. These doctrinal winds come with sleight of hand and cunning craftiness, whereby those who bring them lie in wait to deceive! False teachers come in. Rather, false teachers slip into the church undetected. Some are born there, some join later in life, some call from outside.

And what is to be our evaluation of false teachers who maintain their errors and who seek to lead the church away from Christ her head, to tear her out of him and to make her shipwreck on the rocks of apostasy? Is it that

they suffer from a mere error in judgment? I suppose that we could say that about the rise of some errors. Men are liars. Men are vanity. Men may be deceived, teaching for truth the doctrines of men. We are not to follow men but Christ and his truth.

Grow up into him!

Here we speak of false teachers. There are those who sneak into the church, who love the darkness rather than the light, and who are of the darkness and of the devil.

They use sleight of hand. According to the original Greek of Ephesians 4:14, they are dice players, magicians who are expert in card tricks and other deceptive arts. They are capable and practiced in the arts of theological legerdemain. They play games with the truth.

Teaching and preaching the truth in the church is deadly serious. In the preaching of the truth, Jesus Christ comes to speak to his church, and we must not refuse him who ever speaks in the house of God. The issues are the glory of God, the honor of Jesus Christ, and the salvation and damnation of men.

But not with these false teachers. Preaching in the church is a game to them. New words and phrases are injected into the teaching of the church. Confusion is introduced, so that the church does not know what to think. Old words and phrases are redefined. Distinctions upon distinctions are piled up like a stack of cards in order that the dealer may draw from it what he pleases. The false doctrine is dressed up in the most appealing language and defended with the most reasonable arguments. Then we must know that false teachers are playing games in the church. They are rolling the dice in their preaching. They are shuffling cards in their teaching. They are playing tricks. At stake in this game are the souls and salvation of the whole church and the very existence of that church as a church of Jesus Christ in the world.

The false teachers work by cunning craftiness, and their mode of operation is deceit. Cunning deceivers! They do not love the truth; they hate it. They ravish the truth and fight against it. But, oh, so cunningly. The men who bring the false teachings are personally pleasing, well-spoken, or of impeccable pedigree. You would say that they only want what is best for the church; they profess great love for Jesus Christ, for his church, and for his truth. So, cunningly with deceit, they subtly substitute the lie for the truth. A little here and a little there, bit by bit, they substitute the lie for the truth. And the ship is off course, heading for shipwreck.

And this is of the devil. Whenever false teachers arise in the church and when—through their games, cunning craftiness, and deceit—false doctrine arises in the church, know for certain that you have to do with the devil. He beguiled Eve through his subtilty. He operates

in the winds of doctrine that blow and in the dice that are thrown by the false teacher.

Be not children!

Jesus Christ gives the gift of ministers to his church to edify the body of Christ. The church is the body of Jesus Christ, and it grows and matures in him till the saints in the church come in the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Christ is the fullness. The church is always growing up into Christ. On this side of the grave, she never attains to that perfection. That perfection is in heaven. To attain to that perfection, she must depart this world. So in this world she must be ever learning, ever growing, ever listening to what the Spirit says to the churches, and ever receiving him whose voice is ever heard in the church of God.

She may not stay a child in the truth. In malice? Yes. As a baby receiving the kingdom? Yes. As a newborn babe, desiring the sincere milk of the word? Yes. But she must never remain a child in the truth. If she stays a child in the truth, she will be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and by every trick of the false teacher and every crafty and deceitful ploy of the spiritual magician.

A child is ignorant. The child's soul and mind are impressionable. The child is of extremely limited knowledge. The child is of limited experience. The child, perhaps above all, takes you at your word. And the child is easily led astray. This is at least one of the reasons for the Christian schools. To turn our children over to the false church and her schools or to the wickedness of the world in the public schools would be to murder their souls and ensure their apostasy from the truth. Children are so vulnerable. That is a child in the natural sense.

And the same holds in the spiritual sense with the truth. A child in the spiritual sense has no clear, profound knowledge of the truth. He has no steadfastness of conviction in that truth. He is therefore receptive, easily receptive, to outside impressions. He listens to every teacher who comes along with his cunning craftiness, is sucked into the false teacher's game with the truth, and very soon finds himself playing that game in his own mind. The deceit of teachers playing dice with the truth escapes him. And thus he is tossed to and fro by the winds of doctrine, duped by the cunning craftiness of the false teacher, who lies in wait to deceive. So that child in the truth is one day defending the truth and speaking what you think he believes and what should guide his every move and decision. The next day he turns around and says the opposite, or his decisions in life bear no resemblance to his confession. He is tossed about like a ship without a rudder on a storm-driven sea. There are those who are born and grow up and learn a little doctrine, and they never move past that. The doctrine never

sinks into their souls. They never grow any more. They are forty, fifty, and even eighty years old; and they are children in the truth. And when the cunning false teacher comes, he quickly blows them off course.

But it is worse!

For the ascended Lord gave his church pastors and teachers, and through them he ever speaks in the church; by them he is ever edifying his church, perfecting the saints for the work of the ministry to cause his church to grow up into him. So that one is growing up into Christ under the preaching of his truth or is being driven away by the winds of false doctrine. There is no neutral ground on the sea of time blown by the winds of false doctrine. It is not the will of Christ to see his church tossed to and fro on every wind of doctrine. He keeps his church and guides her through every wind of doctrine by a sure and true course to everlasting glory. To that end he gave pastors and teachers. It is impossible to sit under Christ's ministration and remain a child.

That the church grows up into Christ is also the purpose of his death and resurrection. He who ascended and gave pastors and teachers first descended into the lower parts of the earth. He came and gave himself as the gift to his church. He who is very high and above all things; he who thought it not robbery to be equal with God; and he who also had astounding glory in the counsel of God as the firstborn of every creature—he descended into the lower parts of the earth. He entered Mary's womb in order shortly to enter the agonies of hell upon the tree of the cross and to enter death and the corruption of the grave.

In that coming down God found Christ in fashion as a man; and God imputed all our sins, filth, guilt, and wickedness to him. Christ descended into the torments and anguish of hell to accomplish all of God's will for our salvation.

That same one who descended also ascended far above all heavens. He ascended because in his descent he had taken away guilt and accomplished salvation and fulfilled the will and counsel of God for our salvation. He ascended, and his people with him, because he was righteous with the very righteousness of God. He, and his people with him, went up far above all heavens to sit down on the right hand of the majesty on high. He willed that where he is his people might be also—the perfect man.

So he gave some pastors and teachers. We do not receive Christ without them. We are not filled by Christ apart from them. He fills us with himself by that means; so that all his grace, mercy, wisdom, glory, righteousness, holiness, and goodness become ours. By that means he causes us constantly to grow. To sit under that preaching of Christ and remain a child is really to reject that preaching and to fight against it and to refuse it as the food that causes us to grow.

That is impossible for the people of God. Those who

are not growing up into Christ are being swept away from him by the stormy winds of false doctrine and by the dice-playing with the truth of cunning, crafty, and deceptive teachers, and that according to the eternal will of God for their destruction.

It is as the apostle says regarding the perilous times during the New Testament age. Perilous times will come: the winds of doctrine will blow with increasing ferocity; men will be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, unthankful, and unholy; despisers of those who are good; lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof; ever learning are they and never coming to the knowledge of the truth. These also resist the truth! They know the truth, but they do not take their stand in it, they are not rooted in it, and they easily forsake it. There is no love of the truth in them; that truth never has laid hold on their hearts, and they do not thereby grow up into Christ but remain spiritual children. And being adults in malice and refusing to receive the kingdom as a little child and not desiring the sincere milk of the word as a newborn babe, they resist the truth and are swept away by the winds of doctrine, tossed to and fro, wrecked on a spiritual Scylla and Charybdis!

Grow up into Christ!

Urgent exhortation!

Christ is the fullness. He is perfection. He is the head. We constantly grow. Grow up spiritually. Grow stronger, grow richer, grow in the grace and knowledge of the Son of God.

To *grow* is to become stronger in the power of faith, so that more and more we live in the knowledge and assurance that Christ is our all in all, that we are nothing apart from him, and that all our blessedness is in him alone. We more and more live in the reality that we are not our own but belong to our faithful savior; that we are his property, his precious possession, in body and soul and in life and death. We more and more understand that with his precious blood he has fully satisfied for all our sins and that everlasting righteousness, salvation, and eternal life are ours in him. We know more and more that we have been delivered from all the power of the devil; that we have the victory over sin, the world, Satan, and the powers of darkness; that we have this in Christ our head!

Precious knowledge!

That we become richer in the knowledge of Christ, that we may know him and the power of his resurrection and the communion of his sufferings. That we know and taste his love more and more in our hearts; that by the power of his Spirit in us, we might more and more reveal the love of God in us through a walk in the light in communion with him and with one another. That we may continue

in sanctification of life, hate sin more and more, and love righteousness more and more; that we may utterly humble ourselves before God as the God of our salvation, becoming nothing before him; so that all that we do, think, and say may be of Christ Jesus our Lord.

That we become more steadfast in hope; that we may keep an eye on the blessed future coming at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, seeking the things above, walking steadfastly toward the new and heavenly Jerusalem. To become stronger in the fight of faith, that we may have on the full armor of God and may fight the good fight to the end, lest any man take our crown.

If I can summarize what it means to grow into Christ: it means that in all our lives we become more and more like our head in everything. By nature we are from a wicked and evil head, from a sinful and guilty head. Christ has cut us out of that evil head and grafted us into himself. And constantly he speaks that we might grow up into him and be made more and more like him in all things. His fullness must be revealed in us to the glory of the Father. Until we arrive at that perfection proposed to us in life eternal!

And that explains why the church must speak the truth in love. The truth of Christ is everything in the church. By the truth everyone is kept in order, all things are moved forward according to the word of Christ, and the ship of the church is guided by a sure hand toward eternal glory.

Oh, do not believe those who twist Ephesians 4:15 to make the church complacent and silent when the winds of doctrine blow against the church. They make “speaking the truth in love” to mean speaking the truth inoffensively, with the right tone, never rebuking or calling out false doctrine and false teachers. So they adorn themselves with the name of love and give themselves a convenient excuse for their lack of faith and lack of growth, by which they are exposed as remaining spiritual children beneath the ministration of Christ.

Speaking the truth in love does not mean speaking the truth inoffensively!

Can one speak the truth inoffensively?

Is it possible to speak the truth without the truth’s seeking out and destroying the lie and all who teach it and believe it? Regardless of the intentions of the speaker, the truth—which is Christ—has its own purpose. The truth attacks the preacher of the lie and calls him a liar, a deceiver, and a deadly magician. The word attacks the wisdom of the false teacher and calls it earthly, sensual, and devilish. The truth shuts the door of the kingdom of heaven to the unbeliever and will give him no peace. There is no peace and concord between the truth and false doctrine. They are bitter and implacable enemies. The truth roots out every lie in us. The truth exposes the very thoughts and intents

of our hearts. When a man comes under the truth and has a lie in his heart, the truth opposes that lie with the very might of the living God. The truth seeks out and destroys the unbeliever and his deadness and lack of faith. The truth pricks the unbeliever, makes him angry, hardens him; and finally, being enraged, he stops his ears and rushes on the truth to gnash on it with his teeth, to stone it, or to nail it to a cross. That is why the truth from a negative viewpoint unifies the church, for the truth cuts off the ungodly and the unbeliever. And positively, the truth gathers God's people to himself and unites them to Christ, keeps them in Christ, and causes them to grow up into Christ.

Thus the only speaking that may be heard in the church is the speaking of the truth in love.

Speaking the truth means the whole word of God as it reveals God in the face of Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation. *Speaking the truth* is to speak Christ!

In love means being rooted in Christ in the love of the truth. Speaking the truth is simply the manifestation of what is in the heart. In the heart the church loves the truth. The truth has laid hold on her. The truth is the beating heart of the body of Christ and all her members. Her whole life comes out of that truth.

Many diverse people can be united together in an outward agreement if they talk about the weather, their businesses, their houses, their cars, their shared likes and dislikes, or their shared hobbies and experiences. But as soon as one opens his mouth to speak the truth in love, he speaks what lives in his heart and what his convictions are, based on the word of God. Then divisions come.

The truth cannot be blamed for that. That truth exposes what is in men's hearts.

But another and heavenly unity is wrought by the speaking of the truth. Christ's speaking his truth in the church bears fruit in the closer and closer unity of his people with Christ; so that they grow up into him, and they speak the truth as that which they love in their hearts. They cleave to that truth and are joined together in that truth. They would rather abandon every friendship in the world and gain for themselves the hatred of the whole world, rather than to depart from the truth one iota.

Let the truth ever be spoken in the church, as by means of it we grow up into Christ and are no more children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.

—NJL

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the Annual Meeting Edition of *Sword and Shield*. In this issue you will find the speeches, reports, and photos of the third annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP), held October 20, 2022, at the Wonderland Tire shop in Byron Center, Michigan.

Two of the three editors of *Sword and Shield* were not able to be present at the meeting. Rev. Nathan Langerak was officiating at his daughter's wedding rehearsal. A hearty congratulations to Reverend Langerak and his family on God's gift of marriage to Dan and Sadie Andringa. Although Reverend Langerak was not able to be present, he has written the meditation, an article on the origins of Reformed Believers Publishing, and the *Finally, Brethren, Farewell* for this issue.

Rev. Martin VanderWal was scheduled to be the keynote speaker for the annual meeting. A few days before the meeting, Reverend VanderWal informed the board of RBP that he had decided to decline its invitation to speak. The topic of Reverend VanderWal's speech was a worthy one: "The Office of Believer: 1953 and Today."

Perhaps that topic could be developed and published in the future.

That left one editor to attend and give an alternate keynote address, which address is reprinted elsewhere in this issue with some very slight editing to adapt it for print.

What this demonstrates as much as anything is that Reformed Believers Publishing is a believers' association. The association does not belong to the editors or even to the board but to the men and women who have associated together for the cause of publishing a theological and polemical magazine. We could have an annual meeting of RBP without a single editor in sight if we wanted, and it would still be a full and profitable meeting.

Having said that, it is a privilege for us as editors to write for *Sword and Shield*. We are very thankful to God for an association that willingly and even eagerly supports the publication of the magazine. May the Lord continue to give our magazine a place for the publication of sound Reformed doctrine.

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

—AL

CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS



Henry Kamps

Welcome

A hearty welcome to all who came out tonight for the third annual meeting. We appreciate your attendance and support of Reformed Believers Publishing, the board, and the editors. Your presence is an encouragement to us.

That is our purpose tonight too. It is to encourage ourselves in the task of representing the true Reformed line through the printed page.

And we need that encouragement, especially in the face of the fierce opposition that we have received and continue to receive. It is easy to become discouraged because of that opposition and also because of the defection in our ranks.

Sword and Shield is now in its third volume year, and the magazine marches on in its battle for God's sovereign, particular grace and unconditional covenant.

If you read the issues from the past year, you will notice a reality there. The reality is a certain devastation that has happened in the wake of our recovery of the truth. This recovery has left a path of devastation of liars and of the lie, which comes through in the whole catalog of past issues of *Sword and Shield*. There is a certain awesomeness to that devastation that is evident to all.

The scripture text on the magazine's cover is actually being realized issue after issue. I will read that text for you:

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. (Deut. 33:29)

I think this text is being fulfilled and realized in the work of Reformed Believers Publishing and its magazine.

It is also true that in issue after issue, God's saints receive a feast—a spiritual feast. The magazine continues to stir excitement and hope among God's people.

Men may oppose, slander, and even reject *Sword and Shield*, but they cannot stop its witness. Neither can they silence the call of *Sword and Shield* to faithfulness and reformation.

We love our magazine for the truth's sake, and we are profoundly thankful for our editors and for their steady, deep, and warm spiritual zeal for God's truth.

And we thank the editors for stamping the magazine with a distinctive character that is theologically positive and sharply polemical, with even a savage ferocity against false doctrine.

So as we go forward, our confidence is in the knowledge that the battle is the Lord's; and the victory is sure in our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns now and forever.

Praise the Lord!

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we come to thee in prayer, and we thank thee for thy covenant of fellowship and friendship which thou hast established with us according to Jesus Christ and thy eternal counsel.

We thank thee that that covenant was realized in the day of Christ in the perfection of God and man together. And we thank thee that in that state of perfection the covenant will continue forever.

We thank thee for redeeming us and for forgiving us all our sins. We thank thee for delivering us from the wrath of God that was due us for all our sins.

We thank thee that we have a perfect righteousness before thee that we can claim as our own. We rejoice in a full and complete and free salvation, which thou hast freely given us. And we magnify thy name and praise thee for the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank thee for Reformed Believers Publishing and the privilege of thy grace which thou hast given to us,

that we may give a distinctive witness to thy truth and to thy absolutely sovereign grace and the unconditional covenant. And we pray that thou would establish our witness to our hearts and that that witness may go far and find thy people wherever they are.

We thank thee for our editors—for their gifts, their courage, and their zeal for the truth. We pray that thou would continue to give them renewed courage and strength so that we may continue as a publishing association to defend thy truth and to set it forth. And grant also to our editors the skill and bravery to unleash the sword against the lie.

We pray too that thou would preserve thy church in these last days of deep and far-advanced apostasy that now manifests itself as Satan's last desperate attempt to destroy the gospel of Christ and the name of Christ from the earth.

We pray that thou would cause that we may persevere in these days and that thou would bind thy saints wherever they are with us in the true faith of the pure gospel of grace in Christ Jesus.

We pray for thy blessing upon our speaker this evening and all our other activities tonight.

Hear us in mercy with the forgiveness of all our sins for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

Introduction of the Speaker

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

Regrettably, Rev. Martin VanderWal, who was scheduled to speak, has declined to speak for us this evening on the topic that was previously announced.

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing wishes to make clear that this was entirely Reverend VanderWal's decision. He was entirely free to speak, and he had an all-expenses-paid invitation from the board. In no way did the board discourage him from speaking for us. We are disappointed and regret his decline.

Reverend Lanning, our editor-in-chief, has graciously offered to address us this evening. We thank him for his willingness to speak to us, especially on the very short notice of Reverend VanderWal's decline.

Reverend Lanning will address us on the topic "Reformed Believers Publishing: A Distinctively Reformed Association."

We look forward to his important and timely speech. Please join me in welcoming Rev. Andy Lanning.



REFORMED BELIEVERS PUBLISHING: A DISTINCTIVELY REFORMED ASSOCIATION

Introduction

I would like to thank Henry for the introduction and for leading us at the beginning of our activities this evening. And I would like to echo Henry's appreciation to those who are present here tonight. It is very encouraging to see the interest in Reformed Believers Publishing, which also is an interest in the magazine that God has given us to publish, *Sword and Shield*. And I'm also thankful that, although not everybody is able to attend tonight, there are many who have said they will be watching over the livestream; and we welcome you this evening as well.

I can't help but think, at the occasion of this annual meeting, of the first annual meeting that was held just down the road in a tent on a cool October evening. That was the first annual meeting of an endeavor that God gave us entirely of his grace and that we did not deserve. The memories of that evening are precious to me and to many of us because we were in a bondage that was deceitful and sneaky, so that we did not even realize the bondage we were in. The bondage that we were in became evident especially to me at that first annual meeting. There we came together with God's people who loved the truth, who loved the Reformed faith, and who were determined to make a witness in this world to that Reformed faith. They were very eager to publish a magazine and determined to send forth a Reformed witness as far as God would carry that magazine on the wings of his Spirit. And when we came together that night, it was like chains broke. It was an experience that I hadn't had and many of us had not had for a long time, of being entirely free to speak in an assembly of the Reformed faith and the truth of God's grace. We were able to speak together face to face of the corruption that had overtaken our now mother church but at that time the denomination of which we were a part. There was a freedom in the air that night, and remarks were made to that effect by some of the speakers as well. We did not realize that we actually were free in the office of believer to speak the truth. We were utterly free to speak the truth; and, as importantly, we were utterly free to condemn the lie, to damn the lie, to be angry with the lie, to want no place for the lie. We didn't know we could speak that way. We didn't know we could have that. The Lord delivered us, and the Lord gave us a great freedom.

And I believe that at this annual meeting of Reformed

Believers Publishing, that same freedom is in evidence. We are at a point not only in the Reformed Protestant Churches but also in our association, in Reformed Believers Publishing, where there is division. That division is evident tonight in the fact that the speaker who was scheduled to speak has declined the invitation. That speaker, Reverend VanderWal, is currently writing publicly against decisions of the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches. Now, can you imagine such a thing: writing publicly against decisions of the Reformed Protestant Churches? And I would say, as recently as four years ago we couldn't imagine such a thing. Who would write publicly against decisions of the Protestant Reformed Churches, for example? What is happening right now in our association and in the Reformed Protestant Churches is an aspect of that freedom of the believer to write the truth. That's what is happening. And I, for one, welcome the open writing—though it hasn't been on the pages of *Sword and Shield*; the open writing in a man's personal blog and on social media posts. I welcome that open writing. It is good for us that we know where we stand, and it is good for us to know whether we can stand together or whether we cannot stand together. That is all for the good. I believe that we ought to see what is happening right now in our association as one of the fruits that God has given us in this association and in the magazine *Sword and Shield*. I'll have a little bit more to say about that later, Lord willing; but I want that at the outset to be known, and I think that's the correct perspective on what is transpiring. What must be tested is whether what the believer writes is the truth. He is not free to write anything but only the truth.

Because the speaker who was invited tonight did decline the invitation and there is a different speaker in his place, the topic also is not going to be the same. I think the topic that Reverend VanderWal had chosen is a very worthy topic: "The Office of Believer: 1953 and Today." That is a striking topic because if you look at 1953, that whole controversy over the conditional covenant versus the unconditional covenant was carried on right before the face of the office of believer. It was not a controversy that was carried on behind closed doors; it was not a controversy that was decided by committee meetings; it was

a controversy that unfolded openly and publicly, with the office of believer not only reading in the *Standard Bearer* all of the things that were being said back and forth about the covenant but the believer also writing in and speaking to the issue himself. The controversy over the unconditional covenant in 1953 in some ways was carried on on the back of the believer and before the face of the believer. That topic is highly worthy of exploration, and I do hope that that topic can be developed in some form at some point. I personally did not feel myself able to pull together a speech on that topic in the allotted time, so I have chosen a topic that is related to events going on in our association at the present.

My topic tonight is “Reformed Believers Publishing: A Distinctively Reformed Association.” It is my conviction, as I believe it is the conviction of the association, that God has given us a distinctively Reformed association at a time when distinctiveness is despised. And it is my conviction, as I believe it is yours, that we must have and maintain a distinctively Reformed association.

And that will only happen by the grace of Jehovah God, for this association and our magazine—the whole cause that we represent of God’s sovereign grace and his sovereign, unconditional covenant—have been given to us. All of this is a gift that none of us deserved. God has given us this gift, and the speech tonight is intended to be praise of him for that distinctive Reformed witness.

What It Means to Be Distinctively Reformed

We ought to know what it means to be a distinctively Reformed association. By being distinctively Reformed I mean this: the association so holds the Reformed faith and defends the Reformed faith and promotes the Reformed faith that this association is inseparably identified with the Reformed faith, so that you cannot think of Reformed Believers Publishing without thinking of the Reformed faith. This is a matter of identity. That’s what *distinctively Reformed* means: a matter of identity.

To be distinctively Reformed we can press further: it means not only that we hold the Reformed faith in such a way that we are identified with that Reformed faith, but it also means that we hold the Reformed faith in such a way that we are distinguished by that Reformed faith from all other associations that either are not Reformed or that take to themselves the name *Reformed* but do not live up to that name. When we speak of being distinctively Reformed, we are speaking of a distinguishing, a separation. We are speaking of being so characterized by the Reformed faith that Reformed Believers Publishing stands alone and stands apart in the whole world of Reformed publications.

And being a distinctively Reformed association, our magazine also will be distinctively Reformed, so that the moment you think “*Sword and Shield*,” you think



Rev. Andrew Lanning

“Reformed” and so that *Sword and Shield* is characterized by the Reformed faith and distinguished from all other Reformed magazines that are published today.

I say that Reformed Believers Publishing *is* and ought to be a *distinctively* Reformed association. That position is not popular. That position is not the mood of the day in the Reformed world. That position is criticized as being proud and arrogant. If an association says, “We are distinctive, and we recognize that we’re distinctive, and we *intend* to be distinctive—that’s our goal,” then that association will inevitably be criticized as proud. “You think that the Reformed faith dies with you. You think as a Reformed association that you are better than any other Reformed association and that you as members are better than all other people.” The accusation against distinctiveness and against being distinctively Reformed is inevitably the charge of pride. And Reformed publications and Reformed churches right along with that are expending themselves today to be anything but distinctive. The order of the day is not distinctiveness; the order of the day is ecumenicity. The order of the day is to be nice and to carry oneself with a kind of false humility; so that churches and publications, when they encounter the lie, can find in their hearts peace with the lie. Whatever they imagine about their niceness and their love and their humility and all of those things, they are hatred of the Reformed faith.

And that is the order of the day. Reformed publications and churches today are not interested in being distinctively Reformed. That can be demonstrated from a wide variety of publications. I will limit myself to how the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) are expending themselves to rid themselves of distinctiveness.

That happened in a recent publication of Professor Engelsma, in which he maintained that “*Reformed is enough!*”¹ That was his watchword in the article: “*Reformed is enough!*” What he was fighting against in that article was a supposed attitude that certain members of the Protestant Reformed Churches had had—which members, conveniently for him, are all now in the Reformed Protestant Churches and in Reformed Believers Publishing—of pride and arrogance, an attitude that they were better than everyone else and that there was no PR as good as these PRs; and that now, in the Reformed Protestant Churches, we consider ourselves to be the wheat of the PRC and the remnant of the PRC that’s left now to be the chaff of the PRC. And his antidote to that supposed pride—and there is the charge that always comes against distinctive Reformed intentions—his antidote that he recommended to the PRC was “*Reformed is enough!*” Now, if you use that phrase *Reformed is enough* to fight a man who is saying, “Reformed is *not* enough”—and there are men who are saying that; the federal vision uses as their watchword “Reformed is not enough”—if you’re using *Reformed is enough* to fight the federal vision’s *Reformed is not enough*, I’m with you. But I would modify it to this: *distinctively Reformed* is enough. However, that phrase *Reformed is enough* or *distinctively Reformed is enough* is wrongly used to fight distinctiveness in doctrine; that is, to be distinguished by the Reformed faith and to live up to the Reformed faith and to insist on being separate from all of those who are tearing down the Reformed faith; so that when Professor Engelsma used that phrase *Reformed is enough*, whatever he thought that was going to mean for the Protestant Reformed Churches, that became the watchword for *don’t be distinctive*. And when you look around you at denominations that are throwing off Reformed doctrine and corrupting that Reformed doctrine at every turn, you can still make nice with those denominations. You can still tell your people that those people are good people. That is the atmosphere in the Protestant Reformed Churches. There is nothing of *distinctively Reformed* in that.

That is the attitude that is evident in the October 15 *Standard Bearer* in Rev. Daniel Holstege’s article in the rubric *All Around Us*, “A View from Ontario, Canada.”² Reverend Holstege notes that in Ontario, Canada, there are many Canadian Reformed Churches and Canadian Reformed people whom he has gotten to know. In the second paragraph of his article, Reverend Holstege gives a brief review of the history between the PRC and the Canadian Reformed Churches. Really, it’s a brief note

of the friendship between Herman Hoeksema and Klaas Schilder. In that paragraph Reverend Holstege merely mentions, almost as if it’s a historical curiosity, that Herman Hoeksema and Klaas Schilder ended up disagreeing doctrinally. I say that he notes that almost as a historical curiosity because there’s no condemnation of Schilder’s conditional covenant and no condemnation of the Canadian Reformed conditional covenant, following Schilder. In fact, the article is a paean of praise to the Canadian Reformed Churches. It praises the Canadian Reformed Churches for their diligent mission work here, there, and everywhere; it recommends the Canadian Reformed literature regarding missions to the Protestant Reformed Churches as helpful. That is *not* distinctively Reformed! And, in fact, it creates an atmosphere among those who are meant to be influenced by the article of finding warmth in their hearts for Canadian Reformed doctrine. That will be the effect. If the PRC and the Canadian Reformed are going to walk together, they must be agreed. They *must* be agreed. And if they are determined to walk together, they will find, before long, they *are* agreed; so that if there is anyone who would still damn—and I mean damn—Canadian Reformed doctrine as heresy, they will find in their generations that those churches do not damn that doctrine but believe it and live it.

That whole atmosphere of opposition to distinctiveness is seen also in the fact that a Protestant Reformed minister can leave the Protestant Reformed Churches with apparently doctrinal concerns and be given an attaboy on the way out, a pat on the back, a word of thanksgiving for services rendered. That can only happen in a denomination where the atmosphere is not distinctive.

And I maintain that Reformed Believers Publishing is, by God’s grace, and must be a distinctively Reformed association. The Reformed faith must be so held and developed by us that we are identified with it and that we are distinguished by it.

How an Association Becomes Distinctively Reformed

Now, how does it happen that an association and the people of God become distinctively Reformed? That happens by the truth of God, the Reformed faith, taking hold of the members. You can say it this way: *you* are not going to make yourselves distinctively Reformed. The *truth* is going to make you distinctively Reformed: the truth of the gospel of sovereign grace, the truth of God’s unconditional covenant with *you*—with you! Who are you, who am I, that God should be so gracious to us? Do you know who

1 David J. Engelsma, “Reformed according to the Creeds is Enough: Once Again the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC),” August 2022; emphasis is Engelsma’s.

2 Daniel Holstege, “A View from Ontario, Canada,” *Standard Bearer* 99, no. 2 (October 15, 2022): 38–40.

God is? Do you know his majesty? Do you know how the angels cover their faces before him? And that God, that holy God, has come to the worm that is you and that is me and said, “You’re my son. You’re my daughter. You come live with me. You abide with me. And I will live with you. I abide with you.” That’s God’s unconditional covenant of grace. And when you in that covenant of grace have within you that old, depraved nature that is a fount of corruption, and when you see the sins that you commit, so that there’s no way that such a wretch could live with Jehovah God, God is gracious to you and says, “But this covenant isn’t established on you. It’s not established on your work or on who you are. It is established on me. It is established on my Son, Jesus Christ.” That truth of the unconditional covenant of grace takes hold of the people of God, as Paul says in Romans 10:8: “The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart.” That word is so near that it’s in your heart. God by the gospel has come to you and taken hold of you. And what is the fruit of that? That when the conditional covenant walks through your door, you hate it! You cannot abide it. You distinguish yourself from it. You damn it as wicked and have no fellowship with it. And then you’re distinctively Reformed. It’s all by the sovereign grace and power and gospel of Jehovah God, so that when we say, “Reformed Believers Publishing is a distinctively Reformed association,” all we are saying is this: “God has been gracious to such as us.” That’s all.

This matter of being distinctively Reformed is a beautiful gift of God to his church because a distinctively Reformed association reflects the very nature of the truth itself. And now we begin to swim in what I consider very deep waters. The truth itself *is* distinctive. The truth in its essence is distinctive. You don’t make the truth distinctive. You don’t take the truth and say, “Now I’m going to make this truth stand out against the lie there and the lie there.” The truth *is itself* distinctive. The truth always of itself is opposed to the lie. The *truth* cannot stand the lie. The *truth* is characterized by opposition to the lie. The truth itself is distinctive.

One of the first ways you can test whether an association or a church or a believer is distinctively Reformed is that when God gives him the truth and takes hold of him by that truth, he cannot help but damn the lie. And so, if somewhere a Reformed association says, “We are distinctively Reformed,” and you listen for a little while, and you hear that it never, never damns the lie, then its failure to condemn the lie has given the lie to its confession. Such an association does not have the truth. The truth *will* condemn the lie. That’s the nature of the truth.

And that takes us to the deepest that I believe we can go: God *himself* is distinctive. When we talk about distinctively Reformed, we’re talking about God! God in his own being is distinguished from all others. God says that in the

passage that was read this evening, Isaiah 43, as he says it in Isaiah 40 and in many other places: “Whom will ye liken to me? Who is like me?” That’s divine speech for his distinctiveness. You search the heavens; you search the earth; you will find no one like unto God. He alone is exalted above the creature. He alone is exalted above everything opposed to him. God in his being is a distinctive God.

That is also the attribute or perfection or praise of God that we call his *holiness*. God has many perfections. God is love; God is right and just; God is eternal; God is omnipotent. One of God’s perfections is his holiness, and in that idea of holiness is this distinctiveness of God because holiness does not mean merely purity, as we sometimes think of it. That is true; God is pure. But God’s holiness means that he is consecrated to himself; and in consecration to himself, he is consecrated *from* all others, so that in the very attribute of God’s holiness is this matter of distinctiveness.

And now let us bring that home to our association. This is a Reformed association. Reformed theology faithfully expresses what God has revealed of himself, so that the true God is the one confessed in the Reformed faith. *Distinctively Reformed* means nothing other than the truth of God, the truth of his unconditional covenant, the truth of his sovereign saving grace. That is all *Reformed* means. Reformed isn’t one brand of Christianity at the buffet; Reformed *is* Christianity. There is no other Christianity than Reformed. Only the Reformed faith teaches the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man. Whatever is not Reformed makes man to be his own savior at some point along the line.

Jehovah God loves his sovereignty. He loves his grace. He loves his unconditional covenant. And when he takes hold of you by that, then you are distinctively Reformed too. You love those things and will not suffer anything to take away those truths.

Specific Characteristics of Being Distinctively Reformed

I would like to spend a little time tonight applying that with regard to specific characteristics of what it means to be distinctively Reformed. You can talk about being distinctively Reformed. You can understand what that means. But now, what are those truths and those characteristics that make an association distinctively Reformed?

First, the truth of election is distinctively Reformed. And when I say, “The truth of election,” I am speaking of the whole decree of God: his decree of Christ as the center of his whole purpose; his decree of all things that shall come to pass; his decree of sovereign election and reprobation. We can summarize the whole decree of God in that one word: *election*. Our fathers used to call it *decretal theology*. We have taken to calling it *election theology*. But it is the same thing. It is the decree of Jehovah God

according to which he has determined everything. And I say that decretal theology, election theology, is distinctively Reformed because in that theology you see God as God. You see God as God with regard to reprobation, so that men are condemned eternally to hell because God said so, and that is not unjust. That is not unfair of God. That is just of him. That's how *God* God is—so sovereign that he reprobates according to his own will and good pleasure, and no one may say to him, “What doest thou?”

In decretal theology we see the grace of election, that Jehovah God chose to himself his church in Christ because of absolutely nothing in you or in me. Nothing. There was nothing in you that drew him to you. Nothing. In fact, you may say and I must say that I am a worse sinner than the reprobate. I don't see into the heart of a reprobate man. I see into my heart, and it is filthy; so that I know myself to be a worse sinner than a reprobate or, as Paul put it, the chief of sinners. And yet God from all eternity, before I was born or had done anything, said, “That one is mine. That's my son. That's *my* son. I'm going to have a home for him in heaven. He's going to have a mansion here with me to live in forever.” That is grace. That election theology is distinctive, very distinctive.

Election theology is distinctive also from this point of view, that election theology is not only a question of *who* but is also a question of *what*. Election is not only this: God says, “I choose you and you and you”—the *who* of whom I'm going to choose. But election is also this: the *what*. What do I choose you unto? I choose you unto membership in the body of Christ. I choose you unto salvation. I choose you unto justification. The whole *what* of your salvation is there in election, so that when you start talking about the different gifts of salvation—fellowship, assurance, peace with God—it is election theology alone that is distinctive and that makes fellowship with God to be God's work alone and the experience of salvation to be from him alone. And everyone who fights that election theology will compromise it.

I make a point of that tonight because that compromise of election theology is well underway in the Protestant Reformed Churches, which is still the Reformed denomination we know best. In Professor Engelsma's book *Gospel Truth of Justification*, he discusses in chapter 13 “Justified When?” In that chapter he asks the question, is justification given to you now, in this moment of time, by faith; or is there a sense in which we can speak of justification at the cross, and is there a sense in which we can speak of justification in eternity—eternal justification? And as Professor Engelsma writes about eternal justification, he says this:

Justification by faith is “real” justification. It is the “reality” of justification. This does not imply the unreality of eternal justification. But it does justice to the truth that biblical justification is a declaration of God by the gospel through faith in the believer's consciousness. This is what justification *is*. Justification in eternity is a full reality, according to God's own decision, only when it realizes itself in the word of the gospel in the consciousness of the elect but guilty sinner, by the operation of the justifying Spirit of Jesus Christ.³

Did you catch that? Professor Engelsma says that eternal justification is a reality. That is, from all eternity God justified his people. He declared them righteous. And he declared them righteous in Christ. It wasn't just this, that from all eternity he declared that someday he *would* declare them righteous—once they were born and once they believed—but in eternity they were declared righteous. But now, confessing that eternal justification is real, Professor Engelsma immediately breaks the counsel, destroys the counsel, of God by saying, “Justification in eternity is a full reality...only when it realizes itself... in the consciousness of the...sinner.” Eternal justification isn't real until you hear it. *Then* it becomes real. And I say, that breaks election. That overthrows election because the counsel of God, then—not only eternal justification but also the whole counsel of God—isn't real until it's realized *here* in time and history.

This goes back to the debate that we've talked about before between Herman Hoeksema and Professor Engelsma on whether the counsel of God is more real than history. Hoeksema maintained that the counsel is more real than history, and Engelsma disagreed with him publicly at his synodical examination. I didn't realize how serious that debate was. I had always thought that was kind-of a curious, cute historical insight into the personality of Herman Hoeksema. But I begin to see that that debate is central to election theology. *Is* election and God's counsel and decree *real*, or is it only real in time and history? And I say that God's counsel is real, so that from all eternity I was righteous in Christ. That's the language of Canons 1.7, where election is defined. God decreed to make Christ the head of the elect. And if he's the head of the elect, then the elect have everything in him already in eternity. You could even say this: you already have your inheritance. You've been in heaven a thousand times a thousand times a thousand years already in God's counsel. That's very real. That's a very real thing. And that doesn't deny the reality of time and history. Time and history are

3 David J. Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017), 259; emphasis is Engelsma's.

the unfolding of that counsel. But that counsel in itself is a very real counsel. That's distinctively Reformed. You're going to lose everything if you break election by making it somehow unreal until it is realized in time.

You can think of the difference this way: if God's eternal decree is not real until it is realized in time, then his decree is only a blueprint. That's all it is. The reality is in time; this is the house that the blueprint directs God to build; this is the reality, and the decree is just the blueprint. But the teaching that the eternal counsel is real means that in God's eternal counsel is the whole house. There is the whole covenant. There is the whole Christ. There is the whole body of Christ. There is your whole inheritance. It's all there. It is the reality. And now in time and history is God's revelation and unfolding of all of that to us.

That's distinctively Reformed decretal theology or election theology.

Distinctively Reformed means, second, that this association is confessional. This association lives out of the confessions and holds the Reformed confessions as authoritative. To be confessional means that the matter of doctrine for us as an association is decided by the Reformed confessions—not because the Reformed confessions are above the word of God but because the Reformed confessions set forth faithfully the divine doctrine of the word of God, so that all matters can be explained and defended out of the confessions. To be a distinctively Reformed association means being confessional.

That has application to the controversy that our association and the Reformed Protestant Churches find ourselves in at the moment. I have thought that perhaps the Reformed Protestant Churches don't have a school problem so much as we have a confessions problem. I think that is being borne out. The confessions are crystal clear on schools. Crystal clear. So clear that every attempt to make the confessions unclear on the schools involves decades of wrangling and decades of sowing seeds. And those seeds have been sown among us for decades, that the Christian school is not required, not a demand of the covenant; it's something else. The confessions put that whole controversy to bed. If you want a further beautiful explanation of that, I highly recommend Reverend Langerak's speech sponsored by Sovereign Reformed Protestant Church.⁴ There the confessional doctrine of the schools as the demand of the covenant is laid out beautifully.

But there is more to that for us: is it hierarchical to decide that matter on the confessions, or is it part of the freedom of the believer—which Reformed Believers Publishing has trumpeted from the beginning—that matters be decided on the basis of the confessions and that we hold

one another to the confessions? That matter is unresolved among some. But let it be resolved among us all that being distinctively Reformed means standing on the confessions; so that when a matter comes up at classis, even if it comes up that very day, and the matter is brought before the confessions for the confessions to speak to, and men are held accountable to the confessions for their offices or for their places in the church, that is not accused of being hierarchical. That is not hierarchy. When the confessions say, "Schools," that is not Langerak or Lanning or anyone else you could think of saying, "Schools"; that is the confessions. And when Reformed believers together, in an association or in the church of Jesus Christ, hold each other to that, that is just being distinctively Reformed; being so distinctively Reformed that any lie opposed to that truth is disgusting, intolerable; so that there may be no compromise—not for a moment—on confessional doctrine.

That is what it means to be distinctively Reformed: it means to be confessional. And that is true liberty for the child of God. We have said for all of our existence now—our few years of existence in Reformed Believers Publishing—that the believer is free to speak the truth. And he is free to condemn the lie. That is true for Editor VanderWal. He is free to speak the truth and free to condemn the lie. That is true for Editor Lanning. That is true for the association members. That is true for every Reformed believer in his office of believer. He is free to speak the truth and to condemn the lie, and no one may say to him when he speaks the truth and condemns the lie, "You mayn't do that"—so much so that here at Reformed Believers Publishing we have maintained that it is our right to write and speak against decisions of assemblies of the churches. I maintain that right yet tonight. Our position at Reformed Believers Publishing has *never* been "You're free to say anything you want," that believers are free to lie or that believers are free to oppose the Reformed standards of the church. The position has never been "You're free to say anything." The position has always been "You are free to speak the truth, and no one may say no to that; and you are free to condemn the lie, and no one may say no to that."

That is how these matters will be decided too. That's distinctively Reformed too, that these matters be decided by the judgment of each believer as he hears what men speak. Is that the truth, or is that the lie?

There is safety. There is freedom for the believer because then our foundation is the truth of Jehovah God himself. And that is a firm foundation that will not fail.

By God's grace he has made Reformed Believers Publishing a distinctively Reformed association. And I can

4 Nathan J. Langerak, "The Necessity and Demand of the Christian School," October 14, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3dmgPsLXzU>.

testify to that personally with a comparison of what it was like to write in the PRC with what it is like to write now for *Sword and Shield*. When I was in Singapore, Maurice Roberts, a foremost champion of common grace, came from the United Kingdom to Singapore and spoke, defending common grace. When I wrote an article in the church's magazine against common grace, I had to look over my shoulder the whole time. The committee was uncomfortable with a sharp letter condemning common grace. Eventually something was published, but I had to look over my shoulder. That was worse in the PRC. When a new school year was going to begin and it was time to write a pastor's article for the church newsletter and I wrote against homeschooling in that article, the consistory had all kinds of wranglings over it, whether it should be published or not, because of all the homeschoolers at Byron Center. With the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA), it was worse yet. The RFPA asked me to review the second volume of Reverend Langerak's

commentary on Corinthians, *Walking in the Way of Love*. And the editors at the *Standard Bearer* went around and around in some of the most bizarre correspondence I have ever been a part of and finally shut down the book review. And it could only finally be published in *Sword and Shield* once that magazine started.

And now in three volumes of writing for *Sword and Shield*, I have never had to look over my shoulder. I have never had to wonder if speaking the truth, writing the truth, is going to be shut down. And the fact that I don't have to look over my shoulder and that we don't have to look over our shoulders in our publication of the magazine is not a testimony to us but to Jehovah God. He has given us his gospel and his truth. He has taken hold of our hearts by that truth, and the fruit of that is a distinctively Reformed association and magazine.

To God be the glory.

I thank you for your time.

—AL

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTION

A REFLECTION

On October 20, 2022, Reformed Believers Publishing held its third annual meeting. These annual meetings—rallies—have been a tremendous source of encouragement for the editors and I am sure for the board and for all who attend. I was unable to attend the annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing this year because of my oldest daughter's wedding. I sorely missed being at the meeting, and I will lack now for a year the encouragement that the meetings have always given to me in the work of writing. When one sees the faces, hears the singing, and speaks with others of the truth, there is a taste of heaven. I have looked forward to the annual meeting with great anticipation each year. Reformed Believers Publishing is an organization of those who love the truth. I love the enthusiasm of the members, and so my regret at being unable to attend the meeting this year.

I would suggest to the board members that they consider holding the annual meeting on a Friday in the future so that, if possible, those from outside the Grand Rapids area might be able to attend more easily by having Friday and Saturday for travel. I am sure there are many who would avail themselves of the opportunity.

Reformed Believers Publishing from its inception was an organization of men from around the United States and Canada. The magazine and organization have supporters from around the world. The board should consider this in planning such a wonderful evening as the annual association meeting. Having the meeting on a Friday would also allow more children to attend without their having to be concerned about getting to bed on time because of school the next day. I reflect on these things and write them to you and ask the board to consider these things.

More important is that this meeting has revealed that the truth continues to divide. When one looks at the effects of the magazine after only three years, it is shocking to see the desolation. One would be tempted to blame the magazine. But division must come according to the sovereign will of God, and the instrument that the Lord uses to bring this division—and desolation—is the speaking of the truth. The truth cuts off many who are carried away on the waves of apostasy, and by this means the truth also brings a lovely unity in the truth. I say that the annual meeting this year revealed that because the scheduled speaker, Rev. Martin VanderWal, decided to cancel

his speech. This was because of division over the issue of schools and the question of being creedally Reformed in the Reformed Protestant Churches. Furthermore, there were several vacancies on the board that had to be filled because men abandoned this cause of the truth for their own ideas and theologies.

Reformed Believers Publishing is an organization that stands for the truth and that was formed by the truth. The truth supports the organization. The truth is the reason for its existence. And the truth has also shaped the organization and will continue to do so. We submit to these workings of the Lord, who through all our history—beginning in the Protestant Reformed Churches with our opposition to the false doctrine in those churches and carrying through to today—has taught us that we may not rely upon men. God teaches us that the Lord is everything and that all men are vanity.

This year's annual meeting gave me an occasion to reflect on where we came from as an organization and, closely allied to that, as Reformed Protestant Churches. I make no secret of the fact that I believe the organization and its magazine, *Sword and Shield*, were instruments in the Lord's hands to bring about reformation in the churches by means of separating us from a false church and forming the churches anew in the Reformed Protestant Churches. If history is any indication, the way of the paper will also be the way of the denomination, and vice versa, for good or evil.

It was originally my intention to write and publish a pamphlet that details the history of the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing and later the Reformed Protestant denomination. I believe this is valuable and fascinating history and that it should not be lost. I would like to include in it the beginnings and then the development of the doctrinal controversy that led to the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing, as well as the history of the actions that the Protestant Reformed Churches took to silence the truth and to kill it, including the suspension of Rev. M. VanderWal, the deposition of Rev. A. Lanning by Byron Center, and then my suspension by Crete that in the end resulted in the formation of a new denomination

of churches. The press of work in the churches has so far prevented me from writing such a pamphlet. I strongly desire in the future to do so, if the Lord gives me strength. At present I have many hundreds of pages of documents and commentary, including decisions of consistories and classes, as well as anecdotes from those involved. I assure you that it is gripping reading for anyone who loves church history or the cause of the truth.

I thought that it would be good to give a little piece of this history through two documents. The first is the "Letter of Concern" that was sent to the board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association, calling for action at the *Standard Bearer*. The second is one of the attachments sent along with that letter, in which the concerned men attempted to prove that their case was not merely one of empty name-calling but that their evaluations were based upon solid facts and history. There were four such attachments. One was from Reverend VanderWal. Another was from Reverend Lanning. Another was an analysis of what at that time was a recently published *Standard Bearer* letter and response.

I feel a sense of grief when I read the names of those who signed the "Letter of Concern." Some have never joined the cause of the truth but stay put in their relative safety, having turned back in the day of battle. Some, having stood in that fight, abandoned the battlefield. Others brought trouble to the church by false doctrine. The ways of the Lord are mysterious, and his judgments are past finding out.

For the rest, the letter from the group of concerned men is a vital part of the history of an organization that was formed to speak God's truth. The letter that follows it shows that our cause was a righteous one based on truth and justice. The truth was under an all-out assault by the ministers and professors of the Protestant Reformed Churches, who were bent on taking the churches in a new direction. Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield* were necessary to free the truth to be heard again, and that truth worked a reformation.

—NJL

Letter of Concern to the Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA)

May 23, 2019

Dear Brothers in Christ of the RFPA Board,

Each of the undersigned are members of the RFPA board, the RFPA association, or *Standard Bearer* (SB)

readers. We come to you with this letter because we are deeply troubled by developments at the board and the paper of the RFPA, the *Standard Bearer*. We have also addressed a letter of concern to the editors of the SB,

detailing our concerns and informing them that we have written a letter to you. The letter is attached.

Through the *SB* the RFPA gave birth to the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) in the early 1920s during the struggle over the false doctrine of common grace in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). In the 1950s the *SB* was instrumental in the preservation of the truth in the PRC during the controversy over the false doctrine of the conditional covenant. We care deeply about the organization and the paper. We love the theology for which they stand historically and officially, the cause for which they were started, and the principles for which they stand.

The theology for which they stand is the truth of God as God in all of creation and in the salvation of elect sinners. It is the truth of the sovereign and particular grace of God and of salvation all of grace, all of God, and all to the glory of the only good God—of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. It is the truth of the Reformed faith, which is the truth of the scriptures. It is the truth as it has been historically maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches over against any and all attempts to diminish the glory of God and to exalt man, especially by such false doctrines as the well-meant gospel offer, common grace, and the conditional covenant.

The cause for which the organization and magazine were started was to give witness to that truth to the glory of God and the salvation of his elect church. The RFPA was formed for this purpose and used the *SB* as the instrument to carry out this purpose.

Chief among the principles for which they stand is the freedom to write that truth, not only in the face of false doctrine but also in the face of trends and pressures to be silent about the truth. The RFPA and the *SB* are *free*. The principle is embodied in the name of the organization and printed in the masthead of every issue of the *SB*. They are free of denominational control. Ultimately, they are free in the truth of God, which gives them their purpose and right of existence. The RFPA is not merely a printer, but it has a right to exist as an independent witness to the truth of God's word based on the office of all believers. The RFPA carries out its calling to witness to that truth through the *SB*. The organization and magazine were started by worthy men while they were still members of the CRC in order to defend the truth of God's sovereign and particular grace against the error of common grace. They were started because the truth—especially in its criticism of false doctrine—could not be heard and was shut out of the CRC paper, the *Banner*. The RFPA and *SB* gave a free voice to the truth that could be heard nowhere else. The founders believed that there must be free discussion of doctrinal issues, not merely for the sake of liberty but also for the truth's sake. The truth is lost in an environment of censorship.

Because the RFPA stands for this truth, this cause, and this principle, it has never been neutral in respect to the truth. The RFPA has never merely hosted a discussion of ideas. The RFPA has decided what the truth is, and it stood for the truth. The RFPA stands for the historic Reformed faith of the creeds as maintained in the PRC as that was explained by the reformers of 1924. In pursuit of the purpose to witness to the Reformed truth, the RFPA has allowed those who speak against it to have their voice heard so that they can be refuted by the truth and so that the truth can stand out victoriously. The Protestant Reformed truth, first and foremost, is given a voice by the RFPA.

We believe that the *SB* through the leadership of the present editors has departed from the purpose, mission, and principles of its founding and that the RFPA board is acquiescing in that departure.

First, the editors have set a direction for the magazine that is not in keeping with its distinctive character as sharply Protestant Reformed, doctrinal, and polemical. We are dissatisfied with the character of the editorials and the weak tone. This same character and tone are reflected by force of editorial leadership throughout the magazine. We believe this stance of the magazine is not simply the result of different men with different abilities and interests, but it is the result of a conscious decision to tone down the magazine and to take it in another direction. In the present doctrinal controversy in our churches, the editors have at last found a sharp voice, but it is directed against those who stand for the historic positions of the *SB*. This stance of the magazine we find unacceptable. We see it as the end result of the previous bad direction set by the editors and, indeed, as its fruit.

Second, the editors are taking away the freedom of the magazine. We learned that, after frequent censorship of his writings by the editors, a writer has been dismissed from writing for the rubric "All Around Us." We discovered through a letter published on the RFPA blog that a minister could not have his letter about the doctrinal controversy which recently was decided by the synod of the PRC published in the *SB*. We learned that still another letter, intending to carry on a discussion of that current doctrinal controversy in the PRC and to give a response to the editors, cannot be published in the *SB*. Another minister could not have published his letter about some editorials. We learned that another letter, written by yet another minister about the doctrinal controversy in the PRC, took months to publish and only after efforts by the editors to have the writer withdraw the letter or substantially change it. We learned that the same minister has offered to write guest articles in the *SB* to illuminate the *SB* readership on the current doctrinal controversy in our churches, but he was turned down. We understand that there has been interference from the editors of the *SB* at the RFPA, with

a view to having certain content about the doctrinal controversy in our churches placed on the RFPA blog taken down and to hinder the free publication of articles on the blog that may be critical of writing in the *SB*. Efforts to have discussions about these issues in the *SB* have been met with denials, deflections, criticisms, silence, delays, and refusals to publish. That is bad enough of itself, but it is more serious when those who are obstructed and shut out are promoting the truth historically championed on the pages of the *SB*.

Third, there are recent troubling developments on the editorial pages of the *SB*. When the PRC were going through a doctrinal controversy over the place of works in salvation, the editorial pages of the *SB* were silent. The controversy dealt with the fundamental doctrines of justification and the unconditional covenant, yet the *SB* said nothing. As soon as a decision was made by our synod, the editorials of the *SB* minimized the issue and declared that it was neither false doctrine nor heresy, made threats against those who insisted that the issue was so serious, and insinuated that there are such radicals lurking in the PRC. Soon afterward editorials appeared that condemned a new species of antinomianism that was allegedly a danger in the PRC. Now the editors of the *SB* are criticizing the doctrine of the PRC as developed and taught to us by Rev. Herman Hoeksema and maintained through the doctrinal split of 1953. The editors are using the *SB* as a platform to call that doctrine dangerous and to call those who espouse and maintain that doctrine antinomian and hyper-Calvinistic—the very charges that this denomination and that paper have endured through the decades for their stand for the truth. For the first time in its illustrious history, the *SB* was shamefully silent during a serious doctrinal controversy in the PRC over the very heart of the gospel. Now having found a voice, the editors of the *SB* are criticizing the doctrine that is necessary to expose the error just faced in our churches. If there had been no blog writing, there would have been no writing at all that publicly discussed the issues to inform and to instruct. We are still suffering at present from a great dearth of information and a flood of misinformation in that many are totally clueless about what the issues are that our churches are facing, do not understand their seriousness, or have a completely wrong understanding of the issues.

Fourth, we learned that the RFPA has given up control over the content of the magazine by means of an agreement that fundamentally alters the long-standing relationship between the RFPA and *SB*. The fact that such a document was deemed necessary is indicative of the problem in the relationship between the *SB* and the RFPA and of a power struggle for control of the content of the *SB*. The *SB* magazine is owned by the RFPA and is the paper of the members of the association and really of its readership. The paper has been taken over by the editors of the

SB and is being pressed in a direction with which we are in disagreement. The editors are not vigorously maintaining the historic character of the magazine as Protestant Reformed, doctrinal, and polemical. They have censored content, refused good letters, and not honored the principle of the paper of freedom to write on the issues. The editors were silent during the recent doctrinal controversy in our churches. Now they have instigated criticism in the paper of the Protestant Reformed truth and believers who stand for it. We believe the RFPA board has acquiesced in this and given up control of the paper, especially by means of the document that states the relationship between the RFPA and *SB*. The document alters the relationship between the RFPA and *SB* by ceding control of the content of the paper to the editorial staff and taking it away from the organization in whose hands it properly lies, but also by making the relationship, which heretofore was as organic and harmonious as that between the hand and the arm, into a legal contract. We strongly disagree with this and believe it serves to take the *SB* away from the organization that started and owns it and to insulate the paper and the direction the editors are taking it from criticism by the board and ultimately by the RFPA.

We are writing this to you to call you to take action on these issues. The RFPA board needs to assert its sovereign control over the paper and its content. The association itself will have the ultimate say. If the board is unwilling to take action, we are willing to address a letter to the RFPA board in harmony with the constitution's rules, which allow fifteen members to call for a special association meeting to address these matters. We are calling the RFPA board to see these things as serious problems and to address them decisively, without delay, and with all due and deliberate speed.

We feel compelled to write this to you by a sense of the gravity of the changes taking place, the urgency of the issues facing our churches, and a growing sense that if nothing is done at all, the illustrious heritage of the RFPA and *SB* as a clear and feared witness to the Reformed faith as officially maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches will be lost, and the principles—especially freedom—for which the RFPA has historically stood will be further eroded.

We are further compelled to write this letter because we believe that at present the churches are in the midst of an unsettled doctrinal controversy over fundamental doctrines of the Reformed faith, such as the call of the gospel, the nature and definition of grace, the understanding of faith, the place of works in salvation, and ultimately, then, the truth of God's unconditional covenant and salvation by grace alone. We believe that the truth on these matters is not receiving a hearing at the *SB*.

The men of the RFPA board must make up their minds where they stand on the issue of the truth and on the principles, constitution, and history of the organization. The

RFPFA stands on the truth and must take the side of the truth. The RFPFA must demand that the truth be given a voice, especially as that has been historically maintained in the PRC and found on the pages of the magazine. The RFPFA stands for freedom for the truth to be heard. The truth will prevail. The only question is whether the RFPFA will be found among its supporters as it has been in the past. The RFPFA is not a neutral organization. It becomes irrelevant if it is neutral; and worst it betrays its purpose, constitution, and history. That is what is at stake here.

As proof—by no means exhaustive—of the issues that we raise in our letter, we include four attachments. First, we attach a letter that was rejected for publication in the *SB*. We agree with this letter and believe it must be published immediately. We include a brief explanation of the circumstances surrounding its rejection. Second, we include a letter from Rev. M. VanderWal that was rejected. Third, we

include a timeline and recollection from Rev. A. Lanning about his experience with the *SB* editors regarding his letter to the *SB*. Fourth, we attach a brief analysis of a recent editorial response to a letter that was printed in the May 15 *SB* that was in many respects the impetus for this letter.

For the cause of the gospel,

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
Rev. Andy W. Lanning
Rev. Martin L. VanderWal
Ryan D. Brunsting
Daryl A. Bleyenbergh
Kevin D. Schipper
Wayne M. Courtney
Les Kamps
John R. Cleveland Jr.
Andy Birkett

Jon Langerak
Aaron J. Cleveland
Henry Kamps
Brian Hilt
Philip Rainey
Gordon J. Schipper
Nathan M. Price
Daniel J. DeJong
Jason Cleveland
Craig D. Ferguson

Attachment 1: Rejected Letter of Rev. N. Langerak

An Explanation of the Letter

In the October 1, 2018, issue of the *SB*, Rev. K. Koole wrote his infamous editorial “What Must I Do...?,” in which he gave a different explanation of the call of the Philippian jailor than Herman Hoeksema had; Reverend Koole later called Hoeksema’s explanation “Nonsense!”¹

On October 8, 2018, Rev. N. Langerak wrote a letter disagreeing with Koole’s editorial and sent it to the *SB* editorial office. The editors of the *SB* would not publish the letter without Reverend Langerak’s making substantial changes to the letter’s content and because of the letter’s length. This was evidence of the censorship and collusion of the *SB* editors in silencing the voice of the believer.

Then, as an RFPFA-approved blog writer, Reverend Langerak published the rejected letter on the RFPFA blog. This set off a firestorm of opposition from the *SB* editors, in which they demanded meetings with the RFPFA staff to get the letter taken down from the blog. Only after many unsuccessful attempts by the editors to have the letter pulled down from the blog did they publish the letter in the *SB*, along with a response from Reverend Koole. His response was as bad as or worse than his original editorial.

The letter that is attached [to the “Letter of Concern”] is a follow-up and a response to Reverend Koole’s response to the original [rejected and then published] letter. The follow-up letter was also sent to the *SB* office for publication. It is no small point that this letter was sent in January, and the *SB* editors gave no response until March. When they finally did respond, it was only after they had made sure the letter would not be published on the RFPFA blog. Their response was a refusal to publish the letter.

This letter was refused publication in the *SB* because the *SB* editors charged Reverend Langerak with the sin of lying because he wrote on the blog that the *SB* editors would not publish his original letter. As a consequence, they refused to publish anything by him until he met certain demands of theirs.

The material sent by the group of concerned men laid before the board of the RFPFA its calling to take action. The truth was being stifled by the editors of the *SB*. It could not be heard freely on the pages of the *SB*. The RFPFA board did nothing. They forsook their calling to speak and defend the truth. Thus the need for an organization that was founded on the principle that the believer has the right to speak the truth.

1 Kenneth Koole, “What Must I Do...?,” *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 15, 2018): 6–9; Kenneth Koole, “Response,” *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 12 (March 15, 2019): 279.

Rev. N. Langerak's Letter

January 7, 2019

Dear Editors of the *Standard Bearer*,

I read Reverend Koole's rebuttal of my blog post in the *Standard Bearer* [November 15, 2018]. He reiterates without proof that the controversy recently decided by synod was about the question, "What is to be judged as antinomianism?" Can he not see that this matter of antinomianism only came up as a false charge against objections to preaching that compromised the gospel of grace? The gospel of grace in its criticism of that preaching was charged with being antinomian.

In his response Reverend Koole continues to press his point about the threat of antinomianism that he "fears," by criticizing "men full of misguided zeal" for the truth that the salvation of the sinner is

all of grace, and therefore all of God (in reaction to Arminianism or work-righteousness), but doing so by insisting that the preaching emphasize simply what God has done for us (prompting the believer to gratitude) and that the preacher then steer clear of stressing also how the hearer is called to live if he will experientially know the salvation and approval of his God.

Is this a description of the kind of men who "loudly subscribe to the Canons and then proceed to trouble the churches with their antinomian sentiments again and again"? Is this a description of "those of an antinomian strain in our churches"? Since he is referring to preachers in our churches, my questions are, who are they, and what have they preached or written to which he can point as evidence of their misguided zeal?

But there is something curious about these misguided preachers. Are they a description of the real opponent *in this controversy* for Reverend Koole and the real problem in our churches as he sees it?

Let us examine the thinking of these preachers. They have a zeal for protecting the doctrine of salvation all of grace. They do that out of loathing for Arminianism and work-righteousness. In their preaching they emphasize simply what God has done for us. They believe that this prompts gratitude. What preachers! They would build up faith, since the gospel is not what one must do for salvation but what God has accomplished by Jesus Christ and applies to us for salvation.

Reverend Koole accuses these men of antinomianism because they "steer clear of stressing also how the hearer is called to live if he will experientially know the salvation and approval of his God." These preachers are not accused of avoiding preaching on how the believer is called to live

in thankfulness for his salvation. They are not accused of minimizing the law of God and the call to sanctified living. They are not accused of avoiding the exhortations and admonitions of the word of God. Doing that, they could legitimately be charge with antinomianism.

So what is this doctrine that earns a preacher the label of *antinomian* if he avoids that doctrine? "How the hearer is called to live" means obedience to the law of God. Reverend Koole makes the hearer's experiential knowledge of the salvation and approval of God dependent on the hearer's obedience. These preachers are condemned as antinomian because they will not tell the people that *if* they will know the salvation and approval of God, they must obey the law of God. Reverend Koole adds the word "experientially." But to know the salvation and the approval of God is experiential.

The apostle Paul says that we know the salvation and approval of God by faith:

8. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,
9. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:
10. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. (Phil. 3:8-10)

Our obedience the apostle calls the "righteousness, which is of the law." This he counts loss and dung to be found in Christ with the righteousness of God, which is by faith. On the ground of that righteousness, we know both the salvation and the approval of God experientially; since our salvation consists in the forgiveness of sins, and justification is the approval of God. *That I may know him* is the translation of the Greek infinitive of purpose. The apostle says that forsaking our own obedience as righteousness is necessary *in order that* we know Christ, know the power of his resurrection, and know the fellowship of his sufferings. To know Christ is personally and experientially to know him as the complete savior who saves from the guilt and the pollution of sin. To know the power of his resurrection is to know personally and experientially the power of the resurrection of Christ to justify and grant eternal life and to transform the believer and make him a new creature in all his life. To know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is

to know the persecution of the world because the believer stands in the world that hates Christ, confessing his truth and living to his glory. So long as we hold on to our obedience as necessary to know the salvation and the approval of God—for righteousness—we are ignorant of Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering. The apostle says that we know all these treasures of Christ—experientially—only by casting off our obedience for righteousness and having Christ and his righteousness by faith. In short, we know all this by faith because we know Christ by faith.

In light of the passage, is it not wrong to teach that obedience is the *if* on which the experiential knowledge of the salvation and approval of God depend? Where is this doctrine in the creeds? Is this an example of the “development” that “needs to be done” in “understanding grace in its sanctifying power”?

If making the knowledge of the salvation and approval of God depend on obedience is the idea behind the novel quest that Reverend Koole suggests for “wording” that “may be used in the preaching...to prompt and promote godliness,” then I say, “No, thank you.” Making some aspect of salvation—also the experience of it—dependent on works does not prompt godliness but promotes a smug self-righteousness.

I like these imaginary preachers then. I wish they were real men. I find that their zeal for the truth that salvation is all of God manifests itself in avoiding the doctrine that Reverend Koole praises as essential to the gospel and for which he charges them with antinomianism. They are not antinomian at all, but they preach the gospel. Reverend Koole’s imaginary preachers—and all who are like them—are to be commended for avoiding that kind of preaching. I doubt they would have any interest in Reverend Koole’s quest for “wording” to “prompt godliness.”

Reverend Koole gets exercised about one of a series of questions that I asked in my blog post. I asked, “Are they [good works] fruits of faith or do works along with faith obtain? Is fellowship with the Father by faith and by the good works that faith produces? Is salvation by faith and by the works of faith?” Rev. Koole writes,

The first two can pass inspection, but the third?... As if that was what Hope’s consistory was approving, what was being preached from their pulpit, and most of its members were oblivious to? And that this is what Classis East was willing to defend by its decisions? That is a serious misrepresentation. *That* was not the issue before synod. To indicate that it was is not honest or helpful.

As if...!
What if?

What if it was preached, approved, and defended, and thus before synod that “we do good works to have our prayers answered...we do good works so that we can receive God’s grace and Holy Spirit in our conscience...obedience is required here, obedience that I must perform in order to enjoy fellowship with God...The way of a holy life matters; it is the way to the Father” (*Acts of Synod 2018*).

All this was preached, approved, and defended under the banner of prompting and promoting godliness and exposing radical antinomians of all shades.

Synod said that these condemned statements compromised justification and the unconditional covenant. If justification and the covenant are about anything, they are about the truth that *salvation* is by *faith alone* and not by faith and faith’s works.

It is surprising that Reverend Koole would see any difference among the three questions that I asked. He accepts the first two as legitimate, but the third is simply the extension of them. How are the questions different? The three questions do not present the truth over against three different errors but over against one and the same error that can be stated three different ways, more or less subtly. The three questions are all equally serious because they all compromise justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant.

I wonder if the new search to find “wording” to “prompt godliness” was not begun because synod took away words and phrases that many thought were a fine way to prompt godliness and criticism of which was judged as antinomian, but that in fact the words and phrases compromised the gospel.

His imaginary preachers will not preach “how the hearer is called to live if he will experientially know the salvation and approval of God.” The sad thing is that Reverend Koole criticizes them for a reactionary and misguided zeal for grace and condemns them as antinomian. I challenge the editor of the *Standard Bearer* to explain how the fault that he finds with those preachers differs at all from the theology of the statements quoted above. If those preachers are antinomian, then synod was dead wrong.

I wish there were more of these “antinomian” preachers. They remind me of Hoeksema, who wrote,

If the preaching of the law would leave the impression with the church of Jesus Christ that somehow we must add to the righteousness that is in Jesus Christ our Lord, then, of course, it would be far better that we never heard at all of the law again. (*Triple Knowledge*, 3:443)

Cordially in Christ,
Nathan J. Langerak

THE SWATH BEHIND US NOW: DEVASTATION AND LIBERATION

It has been almost three years since the first issue of *Sword and Shield* hit mailboxes in June 2020.

In the chairman's opening remarks at the recent annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing, I said that as one surveys the past issues of our magazine, he can see the ground that has been traveled and now recognize the recovery of the true Reformed line and confession that *Sword and Shield* has brought about. One sees too a devastation in the wake of that recovery of the truth.

You can see that *now*.

The clash of the battlefield when it moves forward across territory brings with it gruesome scenes of bodies, the scorched earth, and the all-out wreckage of war. That same reality happens in the war for the truth. There is a certain devastation because of that.

What do we now witness after almost three years of bitter fighting for the pure gospel of sovereign grace against the lie in our mother church, as that war has been waged on the pages of *Sword and Shield*?

When we gave again a vigorous witness to the gospel of God's absolutely sovereign grace through our magazine, no one knew or could see where that would lead and what would be the outcome. With all our hearts we desired that this renewed witness to the truth would work reformation, a reviving, and a return to the pure gospel of sovereign grace *within* our beloved Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). This was our hope and longing. Our aim was simply to unleash the truth again after it had been held under for so long and even silenced in our mother church. We desired with all our hearts to have for ourselves again the full-throated confession of the gospel of sovereign, particular grace that we once enjoyed and that filled our hearts and to experience again the glory and joy of that gospel. We wanted to have back in our grip the fullness of our heritage in the truth that we always believed and confessed, to have that truth ring out once again, and to rally together in that glorious confession.

We were naïve.

We can see that *now*.

The PRC declared all-out war against us. They unleashed fury on us. They slandered us as fanatics, anti-nomians, hyper-Calvinists, schismatics, and whatnot else. Then they cast us and our testimony out of the synagogue

and deposed faithful officebearers. This was *only* because of our determination to give a clear and unequivocal witness to God's absolutely sovereign predestination; sovereign, particular grace; and God's unconditional covenant of friendship with his elect, established and fully realized in Jesus Christ according to God's eternal counsel. *Only* because we proclaimed that God is God and that salvation is only of the Lord, we were cast out.

Since then a fierce fight has ensued on the pages of *Sword and Shield* for the pure gospel of sovereign grace against the lie that had raised its head in our mother church. The clash has been pronounced and sharp.

What has been the outcome?

What is that devastation that we can see now on the swath of battle behind us?

The Protestant Reformed clergy and the majority of the membership have decisively rejected our testimony to the pure gospel of grace and our distinctively Protestant Reformed heritage, and they have refused to return to the old paths. For years the men in leadership in the PRC saw *themselves* and promoted *themselves* as staunch custodians of the faith and those who supremely maintained the true line of what was "Reformed" and who also boasted of being even PROTESTANT REFORMED. They wanted to be identified with the old, great reformers, especially the reformer of 1924, Herman Hoeksema; and they were proud to claim themselves as his spiritual sons.

In what is now their wholesale rejection of our witness to *that very truth and heritage*, they reveal themselves as apostates. It is now apparent that all their boasting and claims were the mere pretenses of the apostate, who built and garnished the tombs of the prophets and blessed their memory, while killing Christ afresh and reviling his people. *By* its defense and fight for the truth, *Sword and Shield* has exposed, for everyone to see, who the clergy in the PRC really are and what the Protestant Reformed denomination really is. *Sword and Shield* on its pages has thrown a light on a brood of quislings, who were hiding undercover for decades in the PRC. The leadership and clergy of the PRC are men who actually despise Herman Hoeksema and his theology in spite of their loud, public, high praise of him. For years they successfully camouflaged their hatred of him and his theology. Like beautiful, whited sepulchers full of dead men's bones, these

men covered their lies with a cloak of pious externals and vaunted, boasted claims of Protestant Reformed orthodoxy. They actually chafed and suffocated under Herman Hoeksema's theology that gave all the glory to God and none to man. *Sword and Shield* has thrown a light on that and flushed them out of hiding and exposed their project that was designed slowly, piece by piece, and quietly to dismantle the whole system of truth for which that reformer of 1924 had witnessed and given his life. *Sword and Shield* is the strongman that gave these impostors the shove they needed to come out with it, to stop hesitating on their already-decided path, and to get on to where they have always wanted to go. *Sword and Shield* forced them to finish their project of a complete rejection of the theology of Herman Hoeksema that had been underway for decades.

You can see this *now*.

Sword and Shield has uncovered what in my mind is *at the heart* of the doctrinal rot and apostasy of the PRC. The Protestant Reformed Churches were given the fullest development of the truth of God's covenant in the history of the church on earth, and the PRC had the clearest manifestation of the Reformed truth and faith *ever* given to a denomination by God. *Sword and Shield* has now exposed the PRC's apostasy from *that* truth.

Just one poignant illustration will suffice to demonstrate this sad but astounding reality: the April 2022 issue of *Sword and Shield*. This very significant issue demonstrated an apostasy like none other before it in the PRC. That *Sword and Shield* issue gave an extensive treatment to an official Protestant Reformed document regarding the heresy trial of the PRC's heretic Rev. Hubert De Wolf, who was finally condemned officially by the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1953.¹ *Sword and Shield* also gave careful, detailed documentation that the current writings and sermons by Protestant Reformed theologians, professors, and ministers and recent synodical decisions by the PRC are the *very same heresy* as that of Rev. Hubert De Wolf, who overthrew the gospel in the Protestant Reformed Churches and worked to destroy these churches by leading a majority of the members back to the Christian Reformed Church.

The response of every professor, minister, elder, and member of the Protestant Reformed Churches to *Sword and Shield's* utterly damning and irrefutable exposure of gross apostasy *has been only silence! Deafening silence*. The stench of *that* rot does not bother or affect them. They do not care. The theology of Protestant Reformed professors and ministers *is* the very same damnable heresy of the schismatics of 1953.

This matter itself is whoredom for the PRC. It demonstrates that the denomination has *consciously* and deliberately forsaken her glorious privilege of the distinctively Protestant Reformed heritage given to her in 1924 and graciously restored to her in 1953. Demonstrated to everyone who cares to see is that the Protestant Reformed Churches are spiritually bankrupt. The once glorious and queenly denomination no longer has even the right of a separate existence in the Reformed church world. She ingloriously and shamefacedly has to submit to her former foes and give up all her treasures and join with them.

Even though for almost three years, through a clear witness and testimony, *Sword and Shield* has called for reformation and a return to the old paths, the response by the majority of Protestant Reformed clergy and membership is an astounding cold disinterest and an unwillingness to return to the distinctively Reformed confession of their fathers. The Protestant Reformed denomination is shown in all this to be the proverbial sow that was washed and has gone back to wallow in the mire.

You can see that stunning devastation *now*.

The Protestant Reformed denomination has refused instruction, rebuke, and the call to reformation by *Sword and Shield*. Instead, her response has been a whore's forehead. She refuses to blush and repent. She has become hardened. She hates the right way. She wants lovers elsewhere. In the total rejection of the witness of *Sword and Shield*, the Protestant Reformed house is left desolate (Matt 23:38).

Manifest is God's severest judgment of the Protestant Reformed denomination. She had the fullest development of the Reformed truth. She despised it. She turned away from it. This was hidden and covered up for years. It was secret. God knew it. He has now split it wide open for all to see. "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle" (1 Sam. 3:11). There has been a turning away from God and his truth—at first in secret, for a long time undercover and hidden from the eyes of men, but now openly and in a hardened refusal to repent when God sent them prophets and clear testimony against their departure. Against this testimony they respond by mocking in vengeful hate the truth witnessed to them and reviling those who give that testimony. It is impossible to renew unto repentance those who had the purest revelation of God and his truth and who harden themselves and turn away from it. This is the New Testament teaching of Hebrews 6:4–6. In the New Testament dispensation, this applies not only to individuals but to denominations as well. Reformation is no longer possible now for

1 "De Wolf's Examination," in *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 17 (April 2022), 8–25.

the PRC. There will not be another reformation in the PRC. It is urgent for God's saints still lingering in that institution, and they must understand this. They must not look to any of the Protestant Reformed theologians, ministers, or leaders. The PRC have rejected the leaders and prophets whom God raised up to testify to the truth and to work reformation. In judgment God will not give the PRC any more reformers. God already gave them, and the PRC cast them out.

Now manifested is a most dreadful judgment of God upon the PRC. *Sword and Shield* has exposed that the extent of the apostasy of the PRC is nothing less than the total corruption of sheer Arminianism that now manifests itself. This is the fateful, ultimate idolatry that makes *man God*. This then also explains, in light of Romans 1:18–32, the further judgment of God of a rampant, gross sexual perversion of every sort let loose and shown in the top ranks of Protestant Reformed clergy and eldership and pervading the entire denomination to its membership. All of this perversion, which was hidden for years, is now providentially split wide open for all to see. In this is revealed the stunning and awesome judgment of God that he gives over to vile affections and moral atrocities men who had and knew the truth but held it under and turned away from it.

You can see that *now*.

The Protestant Reformed denomination, her clergy, and her membership are now exposed to *themselves*. They now should see that they are not what they claimed to be. The outcome after three years of controversy is that the Protestant Reformed clergy and membership are exposed to *themselves* as apostates from the Protestant Reformed truth that was given to them. *Sword and Shield* has uncovered that they are not truly Protestant Reformed at all. Rather, the glorious truth that God gave to them through Herman Hoeksema has been rejected and is now lost to them. History repeats itself here. The schismatics of 1953 believed that *they* were the ones who were truly Protestant Reformed and that *they* represented what was Protestant Reformed. After a long and fierce battle for God's covenant at that time, it was revealed to the schismatics who *they* really were. They were finally compelled to admit that. *They* were in actuality Christian Reformed. They had to make a sorry and shameful trek back to the Christian Reformed Church.

You can see that connection *now* for the present PRC.

Since the beginning of Reformed Believers Publishing, *Sword and Shield* has been marching forward and onward as a juggernaut in the battle for God's covenant and the pure gospel of grace, destroying the lie and bringing

God's saints freedom from its tyranny and oppression. The Lord has privileged Reformed Believers Publishing and its *Sword and Shield* to maintain his truth that has been cast away by the PRC and to maintain it vigorously against all assaults. We have that truth now. It is seen that we are the continuation of what is truly Protestant Reformed. We are not ashamed to say that. We boast in that. We confess it is all by God's grace to us. In spite of all the slander against us, God has vindicated us and our movement and *Sword and Shield* as reformation and as a return to his truth, once delivered to the saints. It was and has been reformation. It was not schism. God has shown it.

There was a liberation too in the battle for the truth. You have seen photos of the happy faces of those beleaguered and oppressed people in the aftermath of war, weeping for joy at their liberation by the army that came to set their country free again. In *Sword and Shield* we experience too this same joy of liberation and the excitement of solid spiritual food and its enrichment. Reading its pages, the gold tumbles out issue after issue. We stuff our pockets with the regained booty of gospel truth that was taken away from us by our mother church. The magazine has become priceless to us. Truly, because of our magazine we enjoy a remarkable awareness of spiritual reviving and refreshment. We recall what life was like before *Sword and Shield*, and we cannot imagine life without it. We shudder even to think of having to go back to the life of spiritual exile and the wasteland that became our lot in the PRC.

You can see this *now*.

Sword and Shield has faithfully done its work. It has brought to many *liberation* from the lie and great freedom and rejoicing in the truth once again.

Christ commands his people still lingering in Babylon to come out and to stand with us in the heritage of the truth of his absolutely sovereign grace and his unconditional covenant with all the elect.

And he leaves a fearful warning to those who refuse: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).

As friend, you see it *now*.

As foe, you must admit that *now*.

Our boast is in the Lord. Our confession is that the witness we have is of pure grace to us. We are privileged to maintain God's glorious truth and to persevere in that truth.

Praise God.

—Henry Kamps

ANNUAL SECRETARY'S REPORT



Dan Schipper

With thankfulness to God we look back over the second year of publishing our magazine, *Sword and Shield*. We have been humbled to see the work of the Lord in preserving the truth of his gospel, as it is set forth in the pages of this magazine. And this truth, by the providence of God, is being spread throughout the whole world. We give all praise and glory to God for this wonderful privilege of sending forth the gospel through the printed page and pray that it may be used for the gathering of God's elect, as they are found in all lands.

We can report that there are now 2,033 issues of each *Sword and Shield* that are being sent out on a monthly basis, with 101 issues being sent to those outside the United States. These countries include Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Northern Ireland, New Zealand,

Singapore, and the Philippines. With the completion of our first full year of publication, we made available for our subscribers the opportunity to have their volume year of *Sword and Shield* magazines bound together as a hardcover book. We have sold 122 bound volumes of our first publishing year and have some extra copies if anyone would be interested in purchasing one.

The monthly publication and mailing of *Sword and Shield* has been made possible thus far by the generous donations of the magazine's supporters. As God's people read and become convicted that this magazine is God-sent, their support and love for it grows. It is a God-centered magazine with meditations, editorials, and articles on sound doctrine, which make the magazine truly biblical, polemical, and distinctive in the rich heritage of the Reformed faith.

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing again takes this time to thank our editors for their work in writing Reformed articles that are clear in proclaiming the truth of the gospel and that do not leave their readers confused and searching for the truth. We pray that God will grant the writers his grace and Holy Spirit that they may continue to proclaim in writing the truth of the gospel.

We take this time also to thank our excellent copyeditors, Evelyn Langerak and Stephanie Lanning. We appreciate the many hours of labor given to prepare each issue for publication. Thanks also goes to Tami Cleveland for her help with keeping the books and the mailing lists. This all is a great help in the success of our magazine. Above all we give thanks to our great God for his blessing in giving us *Sword and Shield*. We pray for our editors, the staff, and the board that they may remain faithful to the truth of God's word and that we may give all glory to him alone!

—Dan Schipper



CLOSING PRAYER

Our heavenly Father, we rejoice before thee, the living, everlasting God, exalted high above the heavens and the earth and all creatures and perfectly consecrated to thyself over against everything that is not thee. We thank thee, Father, that thy truth is a mighty power, that thy truth is unassailable; so that although many men in the history of the world and in our own day hate the truth and fight it with all their seemingly considerable power and might, their strength is nothing in thy sight, and thy truth stands and shall stand forever.

We thank thee also that the lie, which is very deceptive and whose power is in its deceit, so that many are given over to it and blinded by it, is never victorious; for thou dost reign in the heavens and dost use all things, including the actions of devils and wicked men, for thy purpose. Indeed, thou hast decreed all these things.

We thank thee for the comfort of the gospel of our savior and that thou hast given us by that truth an association and a magazine. We confess before thee, Father, that what

we have tonight and in this association are not the fruits of our might or genius; they are not the products of our will or labor; but they must be ascribed entirely to thy grace.

We pray that thou wilt give us a witness as an association and a magazine. We thank thee for the place that thou hast given. Wilt thou carry thy word forth where we know not, and wilt thou call thy people by that truth unto thyself.

We thank thee for this evening, for the fellowship and unity in the truth of the gospel. We pray, Father, that thou wilt continue to remember us. Remember our frame, too, that we are dust and perishing. Wilt thou stand us upon the rock and found us upon the scriptures and the truth so that, even as an association that is interested in the Reformed faith, we may continue to be distinctive. Wilt thou remember us also in our fellowship of this hour, in our speaking to and hearing one another. Continue to abide with us, forgiving our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen.

—AL

NOTICE OF BOUND VOLUMES

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) is pleased to notify our readers that arrangements have been made for binding volume two of *Sword and Shield*. We received very positive responses to the first round of bound volumes, so we are happy now to offer bound volumes of volume two.

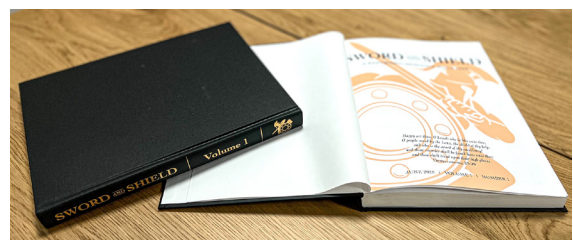
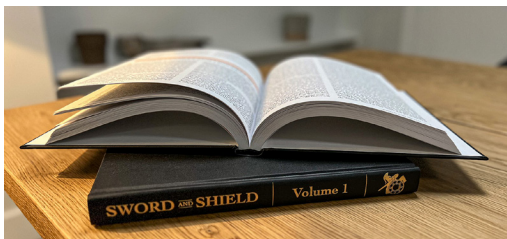
Just as they did with volume one, readers have two options for obtaining volume two. First, you may drop off your own copies of *Sword and Shield* at the office of Reformed Believers Publishing (address on the masthead). The cost for supplying your own copies to be bound is \$35 (USD). Second, if you prefer not to supply your own copies but to use RBP's copies, you may purchase the bound volume two for \$45 (USD). Either way, for less than a tank of gas, you can have *Sword and Shield* in book

format, which can be passed down for years to come.

For those who would like to supply their own copies but who can't find that last issue or two or three under the couch, RBP can usually help fill in a few missing issues at no charge. Just be sure to note on your stack of magazines which issues you are missing. This applies to those who have burned an issue or two as well. It does not matter to us whether you wore out an issue with repeated reading or set it afire in a fit of pique; we'll help you to complete your set.

For those who may not be familiar with how the bound volumes look, we include a couple of photos for your reference and to promote anticipation of having volume two to stand alongside volume one.

—AL





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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

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

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.—Hebrews 13:13

The law said that the bodies of beasts whose blood was brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin were to be burned without the camp. Those priests who busied themselves with the tabernacle and all its laws had no right to eat of those sacrifices. Of all other sacrifices they received their portion. But of the beasts burned without the camp they could not eat.

A sign!

Then as now, those who busy themselves with the things of the law—touch not, taste not, handle not—have no right to eat of that sacrifice. For that sacrifice was a picture of Christ and his work to sanctify his people and to bring them to God. Jesus also suffered without the gate. The Jews captured him—he gave himself up. They tried him and charged him with unspeakable crimes—he answered not a word. They bruised him—like a sheep he opened not his mouth. They led him away outside the city of Jerusalem to be crucified, and there he suffered, the just for the unjust. There he restored what he took not away. And by that sacrifice he perfected forever those who are sanctified. He brought his people to God.

Not in the way of their obedience!

Christ brought his people to God through his own flesh and blood that he made an offering for sin. We, who have cast away all confidence in the law and its works and have believed on Jesus Christ, have Christ; we eat of him and are nourished and sustained by his flesh and blood. All who come to God in the way of their obedience cannot eat of Christ. They have no right. They do not believe in him. And thus they do not come to God, for they have no right. They do not have Christ's righteousness, holiness, and perfect obedience.

And let us, therefore, go out to Jesus Christ without the camp. Let us bear his reproach. He was crucified outside the city because he was rejected by men. And is it any surprise that when you eat of Christ and drink of him and when he sanctifies you and makes you like himself, you will be rejected too? That is his reproach. People are not rejecting you. They are still rejecting Christ. Christ is an offense to them because he takes away all their laws, their works, their obedience, and their repentance and makes them worthless for salvation. Christ declares that he alone is the way, the truth, and the life; and they hate him for it.

It is the glory of the Christian to bear that reproach of Christ. If he is Christ's, he cannot remain in the city. In the city Christ is rejected. Christ is put outside the city walls daily and weekly in many sermons, books, and articles. He is displaced, and his honor and glory as the only savior are reproached. So let us also bear that reproach. Then you must also go outside the camp. If you will retain your friends and associations, your family and your life, then you must stay in the camp; but then you shamefully refuse to bear the reproach of Christ. If you go out of the camp, you will have his reproach; and then you will also lose your name and standing, your family and friends, and even your own life. But you have Christ! Having him, you have the promise of eternal life and an entrance into another city, a heavenly Jerusalem—the glories of which far surpass any glory of this earth—where we will live and reign with Jesus Christ forever.

—NJL