



# SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

FEBRUARY 2024 | VOLUME 4 | NUMBER 10

# CONTENTS

---

- 3**    **MEDITATION**  
THE SOVEREIGN LOVE OF GOD  
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 7**    **EDITORIAL**  
FOLLY...  
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 14**    **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**  
THE OFFICE OF ALL BELIEVER (4):  
THE CHRISTIAN  
Rev. Tyler D. Ophoff
- 22**    **OUR DOCTRINE**  
SACRIFICES (5):  
THE SACRIFICIAL MATERIAL  
Rev. Luke Bomers
- 26**    **RUNNING FOOTMEN**  
THE CONTROVERSY  
OF LORDSHIP SALVATION  
Dan Birkett
- 30**    **INSIGHTS**  
THE WELL-TRAINED DOG  
AND HIS MASTER  
Joel Langerak Jr.
- 35**    **CONTRIBUTION**  
THE BEATITUDES (4):  
THE HUNGRY AND THE THIRSTY  
Garrett Varner
- 40**    **FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL**  
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



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

Editor in chief

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

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

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

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

Signed letters and submissions of general interest may be sent to the editor in chief at [natelangerak@att.net](mailto:natelangerak@att.net) or to

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

705 Pettibone St

Crown Point, IN 46307

*Sword and Shield* does not accept advertising.

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

Reformed Believers Publishing

325 84th St SW, Suite 102

Byron Center, MI 49315

Website: [reformedbelieverspub.org](http://reformedbelieverspub.org)

Email: [office@reformedbelieverspub.org](mailto:office@reformedbelieverspub.org)

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

## THE SOVEREIGN LOVE OF GOD

*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. — 1 John 4:7–10*

**T**he text is an exhortation to us to love one another. We may not miss the connection that where there is no love that is because there is no truth. Yes, the text is also about the truth and that this truth brings with it the glorious virtue of love. All who are begotten of God and know God also love. To know God is the knowledge of the truth. Where there is no love then, that is because there is no truth.

The Lord has given to us the truth again. Do we not hear that on Sunday? Do we not see that in the sacrament of baptism and taste that in the sacrament of the Lord's supper? Do we not rejoice in that truth as it sets us free from the law of sin and death? What is the truth? The truth is that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins that we might live through him. So also, then, the truth is Christ himself. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). This is the truth: God chooses who will be saved, God saves them, and all others are excluded and perish according to God's sovereign will. The truth in short is that salvation is of the Lord by grace alone and not at all of man and his works. Where that is neither received nor believed there cannot be any love. Then neither can someone say, "Let us love one another." But where the truth is received—where they know God because they are born of God—there also can they say, "Let us love one another."

That there is love in the church is the church's chief glory and crown. "There is nothing greater than love," says the apostle Paul. Not even faith or hope is greater than love. During the time of the early church, love caused the church to stand out as a beacon of light against the dark backdrop of Rome's cruelty and barbarity. The ungodly said about the church members, "See how they love one another!"

There is no love in the world. Remember that even the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. What passes for love in the world is only a devilish imitation of love; and

after a single trial, it proves itself to be no love at all. There is no love outside of God. God is love, and all love is of God. Being without God, the world and the false church are without love.

Knowing God, because we are born of God, let us love one another. This exhortation has a solid ground. The ground is God's love of us and God's love in us. I make a distinction here as John does in these verses. God loved us, and God's love is revealed in us. You can describe that as God's love for us and as God's love in us.

In a way entirely antithetical to the popular and Arminian ground of the exhortation, John declares God's love to be the ground of his calling to us to love. The Arminian exhortation is an appeal to the emotions, a kind of persuasion of the sinner. The sinner is moved to see how much God loved him and then is persuaded to love God and to love the neighbor. Such is not John's exhortation. The love of God is sovereign. The love of God is eternal, unchanging, omnipotent. The love of God certainly accomplishes its purpose. The exhortation to love is grounded in that sovereign love of God.

When we speak about love, we are talking about God. The one who loves not knows not God because God is love. To contemplate love is to contemplate the lovely and loving being of God. Love is who God is. From the infinite depths to the infinite heights of God's glorious being, from eternity to eternity, in all that he is and in all that he does, God is love. In his whole divine life, God is love. God does not merely possess love. He is love. For God not to love, for his love to change, would be for him not to be God.

You must begin here to understand the sovereign love of God. Whatever you say of love, you say of God. If your kind of love hates the truth, and if your love endures and excuses iniquity, then that also is your god. If your kind of love fails, your god fails. If God's love changes, God changes. Those who have a false species of love also have

a false, idol god fashioned in the image of their false love. God is love. *God* is love. God *is* love. God is *love*. And God's love is also then eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, and sovereign.

That God is love speaks first of God's love for himself. God does not need another to love or to have love. God has himself, and he loves himself. God's love of himself is his perfection according to which God delights in himself as the only good and ever-blessed God and seeks his glory in everything.

You must conceive of that in the light of God's triune being. Love must have another. Love must have an object to love. There is the lover and the beloved and the love between them. And that is true first and eternally in God. There is the lover and the beloved and the love of the lover toward the beloved within God himself. A god of one person, a god who is not triune, cannot love. God is love because God is triune. In God are three who are God, and that explains the love of God. There is nothing outside of God that he needs in order to have love or to love. He is love in his very being and in all of his divine life as the triune God. And therein is the love of God: God loves God with God. God is the love of God toward God and back toward God. This is simply to say that God the Father loves—the Spirit—God the Son, and God the Son loves—the Spirit—God the Father. God loves God in God. The triune God is love. And more specifically to say that God is love is really to confess the deity of the Holy Spirit. He is the personal love of God for God in God.

And what is love?

Love is out of God. There is no love apart from God. There is no love but God's own love. To understand love, then, you must understand God. John gives no definition of love. "God is love." This is as close as scripture comes to a definition. Love is God, and God is love. But if we may venture a definition: love is a panting after or a desiring of another and a delight in the other as precious. Love is ardent, passionate, fervent desire. Love is an act of the will, wherein the lover determines to do good to the beloved. Love is also then doing good to the beloved. Love does. Love does good, and love does no evil. And love establishes fellowship with another and communes with that other. The end of love is the delightful and blissful fellowship and friendship of the covenant. Covenant and love are inseparable. Love aims for and is fulfilled in covenant fellowship and friendship.

So God loves in himself. He delights in himself as the only good and ever-blessed God. He delights in himself as the God of all wisdom, all power, all grace, and all goodness. He determines to glorify his holy name. He lives in himself in that covenant fellowship of love: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

And all love is of God. That the Holy Spirit insists on. All love is of God! When John says, "Love is of God," he refers to our love of one another. Let us love one another! That love is also of God. When John says, "of God," he means not merely that love is a gift of God so that God causes us to love one another, but John means that love is God's own love in us as that love extends out to the beloved. We share in God's love, and in his love we love one another. Even our love of one another is of God and is God's own love. And if that is true, such is the argument, then all love is of God. All love is God's own love, and there is no love apart from God's love.

There is the love of God in God.

There is the love of God to us.

There is the love of God in us.

There is the love of God in us for God.

There is the love of God in us for each other.

But all love is of God. God is love, and there is no love but his love.

Thus John says that God loved us. This is the first instance of the outgoing love of God. The manifestation of the love of God is that he loved us.

Consider that for a moment. God did not need to love us. He had perfect love in himself. God did not need us to love him. He had perfect love in himself. He loved us freely. He would reveal himself as the God of love, and in that he would reveal also the character of his love. In that love he chose those whom he loved, and he appointed them to salvation.

We also have to say that in Christ God both loved us and chose us. Christ is centrally the beloved, and we are loved in Christ as we are one body with him. God conceived of his people as perfect and as perfected in Christ. We must understand that God's love of us is a love of us as perfected. What I mean is that in his counsel God loved us as those whom he eternally willed to be perfect as he is perfect and as those whom he beheld in Christ crucified as eternally perfect. Yes, in our sins! So that the objects of God's love have no claim on his love and so that the graciousness of his love stands out, and yet as sinners perfected in Christ crucified, God loved us.

God would reveal his love through the way of sin and grace in order to show the character and power of his love toward us. It is a love undeserved. He loved us as redeemed from sin and death, as adopted children, as those who were washed from sin and made perfect. And God's love accomplished all those things. He loved us as the called, the justified, and the sanctified. He loved us as those in whom the whole counsel and will of God for our salvation is fulfilled, and God is glorified in his love.

It is the love of God! That love is as unchangeable and immutable as God. He does not fall in love. Eternally he loves. His love never changes. His love burns ever fervent

from eternity to eternity. His love does not wax or wane. His love does not increase or decrease. With his whole being, he is love; and with his whole being, he unchangeably loves his people. Them God desired to have, and them he surely will have. We were ever his delight. We were the objects of his desire. God willed to have us as his own and to cause us to know him and to enjoy him as our covenant God. He willed to do us good, and he willed to reveal himself to us that we might be included in the sphere of his fellowship and taste the power and the fervency of his love.

It is the love of God! God's love of us is independent; it is unilateral; it is one-sided, absolutely one-sided. The love of God is of him and motivated by him and his eternal good pleasure alone. This is what John means when he says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." This speaks of the sovereign, free, and independent character of the love of God. We cannot understand love by looking at our love of God. Rather, we must look at God's love of us. There we see that God's love is independent, unilateral, absolutely and sovereignly one-sided.

God's love is strictly unilateral, not only in origin but also in its continued operation. God's love does not consist in this: that we love God and because of our love, he now loves us. Nor is the nature of God's love such that we—God and us—simultaneously bring our love to each other. It cannot even be said that love is established between God and us by Christ's position between God and us, so that Christ kindles the flames of God's love for us. Neither is love to be conceived such that God causes us to love him, and then he loves us in return.

Love is of God! Before we loved God, he loves. Before Christ was sent into the world to be a propitiation for our sins, God loves us. He is attracted to us and draws us to himself. God longs for us and causes us to long for him. God delights in us and causes us to have our delight in him. God seeks us, and we are found, and he causes us to seek him! God does not rest until he possesses us and gives himself that we may possess him! "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." Love is the living current of divine goodness that has its source in the triune God, touches us, and takes us up into its stream of everlasting delight. Out of God his love flows to us through our hearts to return to him. Of God, through him, and unto him is love!

Christ is the demonstration of the character of God's love: its one-sidedness, its burning fervency, its absolute sovereignty, its eternal immutability. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins! There, there at the cross; there in Christ, in the astounding wonder of grace that God became flesh; there in all of Christ's lifelong obedience; and there in all his sufferings is the

love of God for us manifested to us. We cannot understand and know, we cannot grasp, the love of God toward us in all its power and all its glory apart from the cross of Christ.

You must know who Christ is to grasp this love of God. Christ is the only-begotten Son of God. Christ is God. Christ is of the same essence of the Father. In the blessed love life of God, Christ is in the bosom of his Father, the delight of his Father and delighting in his Father. Christ is the eternal delight of his Father. And being of the same essence of the Father, Christ took and united to himself sinful flesh, and he came unto his own.

And Christ came to be a propitiation for our sins. Oh, it means that we were enemies of God, dead through trespasses, standing in proud and wanton rebellion against the living God. It means that we were guilty, worthy of damnation, rightful objects of the wrath of God, and that, in God's justice, he could only inflict the punishment of eternal desolation upon us. It means that there was absolutely no way for the love of God to reach us but through the perfect satisfaction of God's justice, that is, through the very depths of hell. It means that we could not, nor would, ever travel this way of hell in perfect obedience of love, as we were required to do in order to make this satisfaction, and become the objects of God's love and favor.

As far as we were concerned, the situation was hopeless! God sent his Son to be the propitiation for sins! This means that there is a covering for all our iniquities! It is not a covering in the sense that now our sins are hidden from before the face of God, though the sins are still there, but it is a covering that took away sin. The damage done by our sins is completely covered. Sin is paid for. The justice of God is satisfied. The way through hell has been traveled in the perfect obedience of love for us, in our stead, and in our behalf by Jesus Christ; and perfect righteous and everlasting life have been accomplished by him.

God sent Christ in eternity; for in God's eternal good pleasure, he ordained Christ to be the head of the church, the firstborn among many brethren, the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. God sent Christ in the fullness of time, in our flesh and in our blood, in the likeness of sinful flesh, that he might be like unto his brethren in all things, sin excepted. God sent Christ all along the way of his humiliation and suffering. God sent Christ loaded with our iniquities to the place of judgment and to the bitter and shameful death of the accursed tree. God sent Christ into the depths of hell to pay the price, to respond with his perfect yes, instead of our wicked and wanton no, to the unchangeable justice of our God, and in all his suffering to love God perfectly for us.

To be a propitiation for our sins! What does it all mean? Oh, to be sure, it declares unto us that the love of God is amazing, unfathomable, adorable. Yes, but this is

the all-important point: it is the revelation of sovereign, of independent, and, therefore, of unquenchable and absolutely irresistible love! Before Christ died, God loved us! Christ's mission, his cross, is the revelation of God's love! God charged Christ with our salvation. God gave us to Christ. God put our salvation in Christ's hands, and Christ loved us and laid down his life for us as the manifestation of the eternal love of God for us and to accomplish the whole will and counsel of God for our redemption.

All about us and within us, there is darkness and that too the darkness of wrath and condemnation. Our present night is a revelation of the wrath of God: in sin bearing more sin; in corruption advancing to deeper corruption; in death giving birth to eternal desolation; in debasement upon debasement; in slippery places on which men hasten to destruction. We behold and are crushed under the burden of God's holy and terrible anger against sin. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). In this darkness of wrath and death and desolation, there shines the one light of divine love, penetrating the universal gloom, swallowing it up, reaching down into our very hearts: the cross of the Son of God! In the darkness light shines! And that love of God reaches out to his people as they sit in darkness and in sin. God seeks them. He comes to them to realize the purpose of his love in them.

The whole history of this dispensation is the unfolding, the manifestation, and the revelation of the sovereign purpose of God's love. When God made Adam, God already had Christ and his people in view. And Adam fell into sin in the service of this purpose. The love of God would be revealed in the way of sin. God's love is not revealed in the way of the obedience of Adam but in the way of sin, in the way of the failure of Adam, and in the way of the failures of God's people. The law came for that purpose, not to make us better but to reveal the sinfulness of sin and the hopelessness of the sinner's condition. So the law teaches that all that man is and all that man does is sin and that he cannot be right with God in order that God's love might be commended to sinners.

And the purpose of God's love is fulfilled by the wonder and power of grace. In the darkness, sin, destruction, and misery that is the world fallen in sin and lying under the curse, the love of God reaches to realize the purpose of his love, to save his people from their misery, and to cause them to taste that the Lord is good.

God comes to speak to his people and to reveal his purpose. In the garden of Eden, God realized his purpose and spoke of Christ. In all the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Old Testament, God testified of his love for his own—not for all Israel but for his own. In that too God is love. He does not love all Israel, but he hates as an aspect

of his own love and his own determination to glorify his name to the highest. God promised, and he pictured that in Christ he would make the way into God's presence plain. And in the fullness of time, God unfolded the purpose of his love in Christ. God reached out in eternal love for his people into the womb of Mary and into the lowest parts of the earth and down into the deepest reaches of hell when the Son of God cried out in agony, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" And God reconciled us to himself, realizing the eternal purpose of his love, while we were yet enemies and sinners against him. God takes away our guilt and removes the barrier of our fellowship with him. In Christ we are reconciled, and in Christ the way to God is made plain. In Christ God sought us, and in Christ we are drawn unto God by the cords of his love.

And God comes to us as we sit in our own darkness, in the darkness of our sins and guilt and the misery and condemnation of our sins; God comes in his love to deliver us and to cause us to know that Jehovah is gracious. Thus John speaks of the love of God in us when he says, "In this was the love of God manifested in us." I know that the King James Version says, "toward us," but the meaning is *in us*. The love of God was manifested in us because God sent his only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. That is the love of God manifested in us. God's love does not remain outside us. God's love comes to us. The love of God lays hold on us, and the love of God manifests itself *in us*. God's love takes us out of darkness and into God's marvelous light. We are dead in our trespasses. We are bound in our guilt. And the love of God is manifested in us by causing us to know the coming of Christ and the cross of Christ and by causing us to live in Christ.

The love of God manifested in us is to taste by experience, to feel the embrace of, and to know the power of the love of God manifested in Christ in the cross of Calvary. The love of God in us is to taste the power of Christ to forgive sins. The love of God in us is to taste the power of Christ to free us from the bondage of sin, to cause us to see our sins, to hate and flee from sin, and to walk in the light. The love of God in us gives us joy in our forgiveness and thankfulness toward God. And that by the Holy Spirit given to us. The love of God in us is the Holy Spirit. He is love in God, and the Holy Spirit is the love of God manifested in us. The Holy Spirit shows us Christ and his cross, gives to us the knowledge of the forgiveness of our sins, and causes us to hate sin and to walk in the light. The love of God is spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.

Again, surveying that wondrous cross and its revelation of sovereign, independent, and never-ceasing love of God, we know that we may and that we do love God and that his love will be perfected in us. The truth that

God sovereignly loved us does not make us careless and profane. That truth does not induce us to say, “Let us sin that God’s love may abound.” On the contrary, that truth is exactly the mighty power of God’s love that draws us; that truth is the unquenchable flame of God’s love that kindles its own response in our hearts; and that truth will do so until we shall forever dwell with God in love!

Beloved, let us love one another!

First, you love God. Not you must; you must; you must. But this: if you do not love God, then the love of the neighbor is impossible. If you love the neighbor, then there is the sure evidence that you love God. The one who does not love his brother, whom he can see, and says that he loves God, whom he cannot see, is a liar, and there is no truth in him. Our love of one another is rooted in love for God. When John says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God,” the apostle does not mean to teach that we do not love God. The apostle teaches that we cannot search for and find the idea of love, the source and origin of love, the full expression of love, in our love for God but that our love of God is God’s own love of himself in us. It is God’s love. Love is of God. Ever our love of God is of God. Our love is God’s loving himself in and through us and embracing us in the fellowship of his love.

Second, and loving God—God’s own love for himself—we love one another. That is God’s love too. God’s love toward us and God’s love in us has this fruit: that we love God and that we love one another. God’s love is absolutely one-sided and absolutely sovereign, and it absolutely and automatically accomplishes the object of its desire, and we love one another.

So beloved, let us love one another because love is of God, and all who love have been begotten of God and know God, and whoever does not love does not know God. I say this to you: If you love not God’s truth, if you love not the brethren, if you love not one another, then I do not know who you are; but I know that you are not begotten of God, that you do not know God, and that you are not known of him.

Beloved, let us love one another. I can say that to you not as an emotional plea, not as an effort at persuasion, but because you know God and the love of God, and you have experienced the power of that love in yourselves.

Let us love one another. Love in the family, love in marriage, love in the church and among the saints. A self-effacing, self-sacrificing, self-crucifying love. Such is the love of God.

—NJL

## EDITORIAL

# FOLLY...

“**T**he fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Ps. 14:1). You must not imagine that the fool who says this is a man of the world, the atheist of Oxford or the agnostic of Harvard. The fool says this in the church among those who profess to know the truth. The fool says this when he ignores the works and words of God that come to him.

On the one hand, folly is simple to understand. All men became fools in Adam. God made man wise. But not conforming himself to the truth that God had revealed to Adam in Eden, especially the truth regarding the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, under the just judgment of God, Adam and all his posterity became fools. Among fallen men there is

no wisdom—except that which is sensual, earthly, and devilish.

On the other hand, folly can be mysterious and vexing. Folly not only afflicts the ignorant, but folly also afflicts those who are otherwise very intelligent. Folly does not have to do with a mere lack of knowledge, although that is often how we excuse folly: “If only they had this sermon to listen to or that article to read, or if only they would hear this argument.” But folly is not about a lack of knowledge. Folly afflicts the learned as well as the unlearned. Folly is a mysterious thing, so that despite every warning and all evidence, men who know the truth continue in their foolish ways.

Folly is a spiritual-ethical failure to act on the

knowledge that one has. Folly, in fact, is to deny the reality that is given in the facts and the knowledge that one has and deliberately and destructively to act contrary to that knowledge. Folly is the sin of refusing to conform oneself and one's life to the knowledge of the truth that one has.

In this there is folly in an earthly and simple sense. It is cold outside, and a man refuses to put on his coat, and he catches pneumonia and dies. The end of folly is always hurt and destruction. There is a more serious folly in the spiritual-theological sense, in which the fool does not conform himself to the knowledge of God. It is not that the fool does not know that God is, or that the fool does not know the truth, or that he needs more time to be instructed. The fool knows the truth, but he will not conform himself and his life to that truth. The fool does not deal with reality. A fool makes up his own reality. The fool denies and opposes the reality that confronts him at every turn.

The ultimate reality of all things is God. Reality is God and his providential working in the world. Reality is God's working his eternal purpose for the coming of his kingdom in Jesus Christ in the salvation of the elect and in the damnation of the reprobate, a kingdom that comes in all of history and in every event of history and, I might add, in every event of church history.

The kingdom of Christ is coming!

The day of the Lord is coming!

This explains all the recent events that have transpired in the Protestant Reformed Churches. This explains that there is and has been a great falling away in these churches. This coming of Christ and his kingdom also explains that a new denomination has been formed. God in Christ is working for the coming of his kingdom, for the cutting off of many, and for the salvation of an elect remnant.

The fool, as it were, stands in the way of that train as it irresistibly moves down its tracks, and he attempts to halt the works of God. Or the fool, being on a collision course in his opposition to God, continues straight on to that collision and is destroyed. And when God's kingdom comes, then God—to stick to the railroad metaphor—throws a switch for the false church, so that while God directs his own church straight on in the truth, he also causes the false church to veer off toward destruction. And the fool, instead of getting off the train at the switch, is either a frantic brakeman who runs up and down the line of cars and pulls emergency brakes, attempting to stop the train that is hurtling down a steep grade to its destruction, or he is the foolish conductor who pours on the coal to increase the train's speed toward its destruction.

“A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished” (Prov. 22:3).

Such folly is on display in the recent agenda for the January 10, 2024, meeting of Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The first bit of folly is actually protesting to this body of men. Has no one observed their disgraceful conduct these past years? The most recent example is the October 2023 decision in the Pete VanDer Schaaf case against the consistory of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church. The classical decision is such a concoction of sophistry as to make the world blush, and the classis actually presented it to the world as wisdom from God on high. Deliberately avoiding the doctrinal issues before them, the classical delegates pronounced on some church political issues, and they could not even get those right. For instance, as wisdom from the Holy Spirit, they tell us that a man cannot be convicted purely on a synodical decision. Well, in that case throw out all doctrinal synodical decisions, and with them the Canons of Dordt, which was a synodical decision. Classis East makes silly distinctions between error, the error of the heresy, false doctrine, and heresy, all in the name of protecting false teachers and their lies. It is all laughable and foolish. And those who actually would protest to this body of men for adjudication of a dispute are foolish. They ignore the reality that Classis East, of all church bodies in the Protestant Reformed Churches, has shown itself to be unrighteous in virtually all that it does, beginning already with the Meyer case and continuing on to today. If you want worldly wisdom—sensual, earthly, and devilish—then, of course, go to Classis East; but if you want wisdom from on high, then you will have to seek it elsewhere because the men of Classis East are devoid of spiritual wisdom.

Regarding Classis East itself—the membership of it—the Lord will have his way with these men and all who are part of that reprehensible group. They hated and opposed God's truth for years. If they did not hate it, then they faithlessly and spinelessly refused to stand up against the lie, or they cravenly went along with the crowd. I have sat in on their classical meetings, and they are dark and dingy places to sit. When they were shown by the Meyers the false doctrine that was being preached at Hope Protestant Reformed Church by her minister, Rev. David Overway, and defended tooth and nail by Hope's consistory, then the classis called good evil, and evil the classis called good. When the 2018 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches actually pointed out the false doctrine, then the men of Classis East did not show an ounce of sorrow but began to undermine the decision. When they were rebuked, then they all cried foul and murdered the man who rebuked them. They cast the Lord Jesus Christ out of their midst and from their pulpits, and they cannot prosper. As scripture says, they are worse than Sodom and Gomorrah.



By the time this writing appears, Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches will have met. Some decision will have been made. If past performances are indicative of future results, then the classis will have judged that the matter is extremely complicated and cannot be completed at one sitting of classis, and so another special committee will have been appointed to examine the matter and to come up with another document full of lies. Because of the complicated nature of the matter, the classis will have to reconvene at some date in the future, probably so close to—or after—the deadline for the agenda of the 2024 Protestant Reformed synod that the matter can be put off for another year at the synodical level.

The folly of the classis is that it opposes the truth that has been so clearly brought to it. The folly of the classis is that the men think that with their wisdom—man’s wisdom, which is earthly, sensual, and devilish—they can find a way out of the predicament into which God in his judgment has led them. The folly of the protestants is that they would trust their cases to such a group of men who have shown themselves to be devoid of the Spirit and thus of wisdom, courage, and sound judgment.

An example of the unrighteousness that passes for righteousness in Classis East is Rev. Martyn McGeown’s protest to the January 10, 2024, meeting of classis. His protest can be summarized this way: Reverend Koole is not guilty of any false teaching, the Protestant Reformed Churches need more of what Reverend Koole has been teaching in the churches, and his doctrine is the doctrine of the Reformed creeds. Slippery McGeown is not so slippery any longer, but he makes clear that he intends to lead the denomination in the way of Koole’s doctrine.

What is of interest to me is that Reverend McGeown served on the classical committee that in October 2023 delivered its duplicitous advice in Peter VanDer Schaaf’s appeal. McGeown now would have us believe that he had a change of heart. He writes,

It might surprise some delegates that I bring this protest, especially since I served on the committee that brought the advice re. the Peter VanderSchaaf appeal. However, upon reflection I realize that Classis East, inadvertently, I trust, has committed an injustice against Rev. Koole which must be corrected.<sup>1</sup>

If that is true, Reverend McGeown must have had a total change of heart between serving on the committee and his protest to the January 2024 meeting of Classis East, a space of a few weeks. But he did not have a total change of heart because he has been defending

Reverend Koole’s doctrine almost from the beginning. What McGeown did was unethical. He believes Koole’s doctrine. He has defended Koole’s doctrine. The doctrine was before the classis. Obviously, the committee of which he was a part avoided the doctrinal issue. Reverend McGeown is a smart man. I am sure that he did not miss the doctrinal issue at that time. The issue that surrounded the whole agenda at the October classis was to deal with the doctrinal issue or not to deal with it.

McGeown writes in his protest,

In addition, Classis East by this decision endorsed the apology of Rev. Koole which reads in part, “My consistory pointed out that a number of Witsius’ statements, as they are worded, no matter how I read them and was convinced what Witsius meant by them, stand in contradiction to decisions of our recent synods (in particular those of 2018) and to our confessions, and thus constitute false doctrine.” “The articles,” Rev. Koole continued, “sowed confusion and, in light of Synod 2018’s decisions, promoted statements and theology that Synod judged to be erroneous” (*Standard Bearer*, vol. 98, issue 4 [November 15, 2021], p. 79). However, Classis East endorsed that apology without judging whether Rev. Koole actually taught false doctrine or whether the statements of Witsius cited and explained by Rev. Koole actually constituted false doctrine. In my judgment Rev. Koole taught neither heresy, nor false doctrine, nor even doctrinal error. Classis East declined even to address the doctrinal matter; yet Classis East still judged the apology both “appropriate and necessary.” It is true that Rev. Koole was convinced by Grandville PRC’s consistory that an apology was necessary, but Classis East should reassure Rev. Koole that his consistory erred in requiring an apology and that his apology was not necessary. (176)

This is not something Reverend McGeown came to after classis. This is something that he has been defending since Reverend Koole wrote the articles in question.

The ethical thing for McGeown as part of the committee was to have written a minority report. One wonders if he actually submitted one to the committee, and he was talked out of bringing it to the floor of classis. His protest to the January 10 meeting of classis is the minority report that he should have written at the October 2023 classis, and the doctrinal issue would have been before the classis. The January classis will probably take up his protest and

1 “Protest of Rev. Martyn McGeown,” in *Agenda of Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, convening January 10, 2024, 176. Page numbers in the agenda for subsequent quotations from various protests are given in text.

accept his lame excuse for his lack of ethics, instead of rebuking him for his duplicity. Folly!

And those who go to Classis East for adjudication trust their cases to men like this, who either engage in or condone this kind of unethical behavior. Folly!

There is a humorous moment in the protest for those of us on the outside. I doubt that Reverend McGeown wrote it to be humorous, but it is an example of the arrogance and conceit that afflict the Protestant Reformed clergy. He writes,

The reader of the *Standard Bearer* must understand that when a Protestant Reformed minister writes an editorial in a Reformed periodical he writes from the perspective that justification is by faith alone to the exclusion of all works and that salvation is entirely the work of God and not the work of man. That should be understood before he reads; that does not need to be endlessly clarified. (184)

Let me translate that for you. Protestant Reformed ministers could not possibly be heretics and false teachers. After all, they tell us that they are all only teaching salvation by grace alone. Once they tell us this, we must give them a pass to teach all kinds of things that are contradictory to it. The reality is that Reverend Koole may have said that he was teaching salvation by grace alone. That was deception on his part. The proof is that he went on to teach that man's works contribute to the possession—and ultimately to the fulfillment—of salvation and that faith and obedience are what man must do to be saved. That cannot be harmonized with the statement that salvation is all of grace. The Bible is very clear, and so are the Reformed creeds, that if salvation is of grace, then it is not of works; and if salvation is of works, then it is not of grace. Reverend Koole is a snake who speaks out of both sides of his mouth to deceive and who plays games with words to entrap. The statement by McGeown shows that he also plays the same kind of dangerous games.

McGeown's protest is full of sophistry too. Sophistry is arguing that the lie is truth and that truth is the lie. Sophistry operates by fallacious arguments that aim to deceive. Listen to McGeown:

Second, Rev. Koole did *not* teach that our good works of obedience function as helps in finding and maintaining assurance of justification. "Good works...do not function as helps for finding and maintaining assurance of our justification" (Acts of Synod 2018, p. 69).

Explanation: Rev. Koole quotes Witsius, "Hence I conclude that sanctification and its effects are by no means to be slighted when we

treat of assuring the soul as to its justification" (*Standard Bearer*, vol. 97, issue 7 [January 1, 2021], p. 151). Rev. Koole's explanation of Witsius' statement is this: "If one has a true love for God and desires to serve him, is that not also an evidence that one has been saved and justified? 'I must be numbered with the saved, with the justified. Why else would I have these affections?' One is conscious, 'aware,' that one is saved and justified. And thus one is reassured that he is numbered with the forgiven and justified after all." Rev. Koole continues his explanation: Witsius is "not speaking of sanctification serving as the basis of justification, but of one's sanctification (which is worked by Christ's Holy Spirit) serving as evidence to the soul that one is numbered with the justified, namely, with those who have received the gift of faith by the same saving Spirit" (*ibid*, p. 151). (179–80)

You cannot make this stuff up. McGeown says that Reverend Koole did not teach that good works of obedience function as helps in finding and maintaining assurance of justification. But Reverend Koole in the words of Witsius says, "Hence I conclude that sanctification and its effects are by no means to be slighted when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification." How much plainer can a man be? Reverend Koole removes all doubt himself when he explains again, "Witsius is 'not speaking of sanctification serving as the basis of justification, but of one's sanctification...serving as evidence to the soul that one is numbered with the justified.'"

Regardless of Reverend McGeown's lack of ethics, his arrogance, and his sophistry, the value of his protest is that it is a thorough doctrinal defense of Reverend Koole, and the protest lays out clearly where the Protestant Reformed denomination is headed with her doctrine. The churches are going to ride the train of Koole's doctrine all the way to its bitter end, and McGeown is going to help the train stay on track.

These are the kinds of men who inhabit Classis East. And a man is going to entrust such men to make a judgment on doctrine? Folly!

Predictably, in the January 10 agenda Pete VanDer Schaaf has another protest. Pete was the cause of the case coming before the September classis, which reconvened in October, because he demurred from the announcement that Reverend Koole put in the *Standard Bearer*, in which Koole gave a non-apology for his stubborn and persistent promotion of false doctrine through his promotion of the writings of Herman Witsius that there is that which man must do to be saved. Having exhumed the body of Herman Witsius and having been told that the body stinks,

Koole buried the body again and tried to wash his hands of the stink. The classis previously told Grandville's consistory that it must retract its condemnation of Reverend Koole and inform its congregation—not the denomination but only the Grandville congregation—of this retraction. But the classis left in place Koole's non-apology in the *Standard Bearer* because classis deemed that the apology was necessary because Koole had been so ambiguous, which is a very common but troublesome and very bad trait in Protestant Reformed ministers, which the classis is trying to stamp out among the clergy. And the classis urged every minister to strive to be clear. How could this be presented with a straight face? Somebody, somewhere, is laughing. Folly!

But Pete picked up on the hypocrisy. If Koole did not teach false doctrine, then not only Grandville's announcement to the congregation must be retracted, but also the announcement in the *Standard Bearer* must be retracted. Pete won in the October classical decision. The theology of Reverend Koole was exonerated of any wrongdoing. And Pete wants his victory complete: retract the *Standard Bearer* apology as well. Seems logical.

Curious though is the way that Pete phrases his request to classis:

That is, that Classis advise the consistory to retract the statement which it caused to be placed in the SB and inform the denomination of its error in causing it to be published. (2)

This request places all the blame for the inclusion of Koole's non-apology in the *Standard Bearer* on the consistory of Grandville. Poor Reverend Koole appears to be only a passive bystander. But Pete's request brings up questions: Where is Reverend Koole? What does he think of his apology? Does he believe his apology?

I analyzed Koole's apology when it came out and proved from its content that it was insincere and that he did not believe a word that he wrote.<sup>2</sup> He may have been uncomfortable with some of the stir that his writings caused, but he never took full blame for the schism that was the result of his writings. Now that apology and the doctrinal judgment of Grandville over Koole's writings are in the docket again. And again, questions arise: Where is Reverend Koole? Why does he not have a document in the agenda, perhaps an addendum to Grandville's protest to classis, maintaining the validity of his apology in the *Standard Bearer*? Why does he not take up the doctrinal sword against the error for which he apologized and that now Pete and McGeown are arguing must be the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches? If Reverend Koole is so sorry for bringing up that doctrine and he really believes the doctrinal judgment of Grandville, you would

think that he would weigh in on this matter, especially since it involves his person and ministry.

But Reverend Koole does not. He is like that divisive person at a gathering who throws out some controversial statement and then sits back and enjoys watching the group descend into chaos. I think Pete might know something about where Reverend Koole stands on his apology and on the theology of Witsius. There is evidence that the apology was an insincere political move to appease and that the apology was not made out of conviction at all. For one, when the matter of Grandville's judgment of Koole came up again, Reverend Koole did not rise to the defense of his own apology and of the consistory's judgment.

So Classis East is going to take up Pete's protest and probably treat it seriously. And will anyone ask, what does Reverend Koole believe about his apology? Folly.

And that brings up the matter of the protests to Classis East from protestants on the other side of the issue. I am not sure they are, in fact, on the other side. Some of the protestants do not argue the doctrinal issue at all. They argue about procedure. They state the obvious that classis did not take up the doctrinal issue and that classis is obligated to take up the doctrinal issue. But let us say for the sake of argument that in the agenda the protests of Pete and McGeown represent one faction, and the rest of the protests represent a faction that does not want Koole's theology. Are those other protests foolish too?

Having read through those protests, I will say that they contain some rather revealing details. This is a section from the protest by Mr. Aric Bleyenbergh:

The basis of the recommendation C is that Grandville's consistory may not say that Rev. Koole taught false doctrine because they didn't sufficiently prove this point from Scripture or the confessions. What is ironic is that Classis could use this as the main basis of proving that Rev. Koole did not teach false doctrine, yet Classis itself never used Scripture or the confessions to prove that there was not false doctrine taught. In fact, Classis avoided almost any discussion whatsoever relating to the doctrine at hand. Classis declared that a consistory erred in judging doctrine without ever discussing the doctrine on the floor of Classis. The only time the doctrine was brought out on the floor was when the appellant himself practically begged Classis to not only discuss the statements, but also to make his case that the statements should be considered as orthodox and ought to be used today in the PRC. Many others questioned whether or not Classis should or would get into the statements

<sup>2</sup> See Nathan J. Langerak, "Apology of Rev. Kenneth Koole," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 15 (March 1, 2022): 14–23.

and the doctrine in question, but actual discussion of doctrine was glaringly absent throughout the deliberations. (137–38)

The other protests contain some excellent analysis. The protest of Mr. Dan Van Uffelen, probably the hardest hitting of the protests, characterizes and proves conclusively that the decision of the previous classis was “false, inconsistent, hierarchical, and negligent” (158).

But in answer to the question, are these protests folly too? I say yes. All these men and Grandville’s consistory, if they believe what they wrote, should have left the Protestant Reformed Churches a long time ago. And now the Lord is making clear that the false doctrine that caused the split in the Protestant Reformed Churches is not only present in the denomination but is also regnant there. These men ignore the reality of where the Protestant Reformed denomination actually is at this point in history. They ignore all the doctrinal development that has happened in the denomination since Koole wrote the articles in question. I had to ask myself, why do they care so much about Reverend Koole, Herman Witsius, and *Standard Bearer* articles that were written years ago and that none of them, save one, did anything about? Why now? The answer is folly.

It is the folly that has deliberately and consciously ignored all that has unfolded in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the past several years and that has made itself comfortable with the official explanations and excuses for what has happened. It is the folly that let the truth and those who promoted the truth be savaged, all the while remaining silent. The folly soothed itself that Reverend Koole had been dealt with. The folly contented itself that the problem had been solved. And the folly did that so that it could remain in the Protestant Reformed Churches and retain connections with the schools; keep jobs; maintain friends and acquaintances; and, probably more important than anything else, keep respectability and distance itself from those regarded as extreme and unloving. And to do that one must play along with the charade that is the Protestant Reformed broader assemblies.

Such folly writes long protests that point out the obvious: the Protestant Reformed Classis East did not take up the doctrinal issue. Does anyone think that the men of Classis East did not know that? They consciously and deliberately with malice aforethought did not take up the doctrinal issue. They did not miss the doctrinal issue. They did not make an unfortunate oversight. They did not want to take up the doctrine. That is because in Classis East, as far as I can tell, there are two kinds of men: cowards and hypocrites. The cowards wring their hands ineffectually but never stand up and get killed for the truth’s sake. And the hypocrites pretend as though they care about the truth, when they could not care less.

The folly behind the protests must pretend that it is dealing with honest and upright men, when by demonstrable fact it is dealing with unfaithful and wicked men. The decision of the October 2023 Classis East was wicked. It was an egregious, conscious, deliberate, hierarchical, and unfaithful act by unfaithful men who knew their duty, who knew the truth, and who would not do their duty because they hate the truth. And the protestants by their protests must pretend that they are dealing with honest men. Folly!

Folly also writes these protests as though a right decision by Classis East in this matter changes anything. It does not. Indeed, the protests give evidence that the protestants themselves are not seeking a right decision. They are seeking a settlement but not justice and truth. Justice and truth would require that Reverend Koole be deposed forthwith. He has shown since 2015 that he hates the truth. He has shown himself to be clever and devious. That too is evident in the agenda. Do you know what is missing in the whole agenda? It is what was missing in the last agenda: a statement by Reverend Koole about what he believes. He taught wicked theology. He gave a false apology, and now men are fighting yet about his theology, and he sits on the sidelines and says nothing. Does he believe his apology or not? He does not. I can assure you. The very form of the apology showed that it was not an apology but was itself a settlement. It was a completely false apology meant to keep an unholy peace. And that apology has served its evil purpose too. It became the occasion to rehash the whole matter. The sorrow of the world always works death, and Reverend Koole’s false apology is also working death, according to the judgment of God. The apology has ensnared and entangled many. And where is Koole? Waiting for his theology to be exonerated fully.

Let us say for the sake of argument that the Protestant Reformed Classis East, convening January 10, 2024, suddenly reverses itself and decides not only to take up the doctrinal issue before classis but also to judge Reverend Koole’s writings to be heretical. It changes nothing at all. What about all the decisions and statements in sermons and writings that have been made since Koole’s articles? Let me give an example that shows the unrighteousness of Grandville’s consistory in condemning Koole for teaching false doctrine but letting him continue to preach in the churches and an example that also shows that Reverend Koole was completely disingenuous when he made his non-apology.

On February 16, 2022, Reverend Koole preached to the congregation of Randolph Protestant Reformed Church a preparatory sermon on the text that the righteous are scarcely saved (1 Pet. 4:18). He preached,

Now it speaks here of the “righteous.” When it speaks of the “righteous,” it is not speaking

primarily of the justified. There are some who have that view, and you can have that view of the text. But that is not, I'm convinced, the real view of the text. It is not speaking simply of the justified. It is speaking of those who, having been justified, walk in an upright way. And as such they are the righteous, you see, as Matthew 5 speaks of the righteous. "Blessed are you when men persecute you for righteousness' sake." Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, and that does not have to do with justification. It has to do with uprightness, who are living in the upright way. And their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees because the scribes and Pharisees just put on an outward show. They kept the law from a certain outward point of view, but it was only what they didn't do. "I didn't do this; I didn't do that; I didn't do the other."

Christ says, "You didn't do this, didn't do... But what did you do? Did you love your neighbor as you ought in your so-called love of God? Did you do good to the neighbor? Or did you despise the widow and those who have no status? Were you like the good Samaritan, or were you not like the good Samaritan?"...

Did you have love? Were you interested in ministering to the needy in the church? Did you treat your spouse with consideration, loving your neighbor as yourself? If not, refrain from the table. Refrain from the table until you are walking in the way of love and your righteousness, your uprightness, exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, who despised others and would get rid of their wives left and right. That is why you had so many divorces and so many prostitutes—women cast off by the scribes and Pharisees in their outward righteousness, and they had no wherewithal but to sell their bodies. And Christ ministered to them, not to approve of their adultery but to call them from their adultery and fornication and to restore them to godliness.<sup>3</sup>

Does anyone who is protesting to Classis East have a problem with that doctrine? The protestants are up in arms that Reverend Koole wrote that our good works contribute to the assurance of our justification. They are up in arms that he said that our good works contribute to our possession of life and salvation. But Reverend Koole preaches the very same thing in different words. Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the

scribes and Pharisees for you to be saved! Take that in the context of his text, 1 Peter 4:18. The scarce salvation of the righteous is by works! Not, mind you, by the cross of Christ and the grace of God but by your works!

Koole grounds his definition of the righteous in Christ's word in the sermon on the mount that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and in so doing he corrupts that text too. Reverend Koole, I understand, makes the contrast between man's love and the Pharisees' lack of love. But that is not what Christ said. He spoke not of the misdeeds of the Pharisees but of their righteousness. There are two types of righteousness contrasted in the text: the Pharisees' righteousness by works and the righteousness freely given for Christ's sake. Christ's righteousness is the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. That is the only meaning of the text in light of Matthew 5:19, which reads, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." There Christ makes entrance into the kingdom of heaven impossible by man's obedience. And in verse 20 Christ gives the reason he said that: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." You must have a righteousness of works that exceeds the Pharisees' righteousness of works to enter the kingdom. That righteousness cannot be your deeds of love, as verse 19 makes plain. Who would say that he has not broken the least of the commandments? Only a Pharisee would, chiefly because he defined the commandments in a way to make them doable. But Christ cuts off the way of entrance into the kingdom by man's works. He makes the way of entrance into the kingdom his own righteousness received by faith alone.

Now, in light of the fact that the protestants are up in arms that Reverend Koole taught that works contribute to the possession and assurance of salvation, let me explain what entrance into the kingdom is. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, entrance into the kingdom is the certain knowledge of "all and every believer, that...all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits." (A 84, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 118). Entrance into the kingdom is to have the assurance of our salvation for Christ's sake. Reverend Koole is still teaching what the protestants claim to reject and for which he supposedly apologized. His whole apology was a complete

3 Kenneth Koole, "The Righteous Scarcely, but Surely, Saved," sermon preached February 16, 2022, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermon-info.asp?SID=1182233043840>.

sham. Protesting his old Witsius articles is worthless. It is folly. The protestants seem to ignore the reality that every week some new doctrinal development rolls out of the Protestant Reformed Churches. They seem to ignore that the denomination has progressed in her error. Proof of that is that men are openly contending that the denomination needs more of Koole's theology that there is that which man must do to be saved. What are the protestants going to do with the Protestant Reformed doctrines that there is that which man must do to be saved; that faith is man's act not God's; that there are things that God requires from man before God gives the things that he has promised in his word—a form of Reformed conditions; that the regenerated sinner is not totally depraved; that God's relationship with his people is a responsive and mutual interplay between grace, reward, and obedience? And I could go on and on. The Protestant Reformed denomination has set her course. That much is plain reality, and all the protests ignore that reality and are foolish.

And more folly. I have it on good report that there are a young minister or two in the Protestant Reformed Churches who are planning to jump off the train and

go to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church if things keep going the way that they are. Leaping from one runaway train to another.

The Lord has left the Protestant Reformed Churches. That is clear with every decision and with every protest.

I have said this before, and I will say it again, "Get out!"

If someone truly believes that there is nothing that man must do to be saved, then there is a denomination that teaches that. The denomination is despised. It is slandered. Her ministers are schismatics. Her organization is but a group. If you join the denomination, you will not keep your friends, your place in the schools, and your standing in the community. But from her pulpits come the glorious gospel of the finished and completed work of Jesus Christ, to which man can add nothing and which is the only work that is necessary for salvation, and of which work man's good works are fruits of thankfulness. This gospel gives the peace that passes all understanding and in the light of which all the persecution causes us to rejoice.

May the Lord open the eyes of his people. Otherwise, their eyes remain closed by folly.

—NJL

## UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

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

# THE OFFICE OF ALL BELIEVER (4): THE CHRISTIAN

## *Introduction*

In scripture the believer is referred to by many names. Believers are called saints, brethren, the elect of God, the faithful, servants of God, beloved, and children of God. But never in scripture does the believer refer to himself as a Christian. The name Christian only appears three times in scripture, and it is never used as a self-designated title. Acts 11:26 records that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. *Christian* was a derogatory term given to believers, not by the Jews but by the heathen world of that day to indicate the sect to which the Christians belonged; namely, they were followers of Christ. The heathen world considered the Christian as merely being

part of a sect. *Christian* was not a term of endearment, and there was a certain reproach attached to that name.

But our Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 12 asks the question, "Why art thou called a Christian?" (Q 32, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 96). Soon that name was adopted by believers themselves. Christ means anointed, and believers too, by God's grace and Spirit, were anointed ones. Christ is God's officebearer, *par excellence*, the perfect officebearer and mediator of the covenant. And the Christian, partaking of Christ's anointing by faith, is also a servant of Jehovah. What began as a popular slang term, believers took to themselves as their own. They called themselves Christians, anointed ones.

You are a Christian! You are an anointed one. This expression and its beauty have been lost. If you ask anyone, even one who is merely somewhat religious, they will say, “Yes, I am a Christian.” The Roman Catholic will insist with an uproar, “Yes, I am a Christian.” The Arminian and the Pelagian will sneer and with resolute firmness will assure you that they are Christians. And so all nominally Reformed church members of our day will say that they are indeed Christians. In the year of our Lord 2024, our country supposedly is still a Christian nation. The fact is, the citizens have no part in the spiritual reality signified by the name. They who claim Christ in name but deny him in doctrine are not Christians. They have no part in Jesus Christ, as they were never of his fold. They do not know him and most never will. God surely accomplishes all his good pleasure and will save his own. His purpose according to election must always stand, and all must serve that divine purpose for his own glory!

Why are *you* called a Christian? Do you just happen to be a Christian because you were born into a church—a Reformed church or even any evangelical church? Or are you a Christian just because you were baptized? Or are you a Christian because you have accepted Christ and have forsaken all to take up your cross and follow him? The answer must be no. Emphatically no!

You are a Christian because you share in Christ’s anointing by faith alone, which is an utterly gracious gift. Upon Christ you are entirely dependent. The anointing is Christ’s; the believer is only a partaker. The believer receives that anointing. Christ is the head; the Christian is the member of Christ’s body. Christ is the vine; the Christian is engrafted into that vine, and from that vine the life-sap flows into the branch, and that branch then draws all its life from the vine. There is only one Christ—the Christ of God; the Christ of the decree; the Christ of the unconditional covenant; the Christ of election; the Christ of sovereign, efficacious, irresistible grace. Only of the anointing of this Christ does the believer partake.

The spiritual reality of our partaking of Christ’s anointing is the fruit of Christ’s imparting himself to us through his Spirit. The office of all believer is strictly the fruit of Christ’s work.

In this article I conclude my treatment of the office of all believer, explaining how this high office is carried out and executed in the world. To have a proper understanding of the office of all believer is important because it is a truth that is disregarded and attacked in many ways today.

### *The Believer as Prophet*

Just as Christ’s office is threefold, so by faith we are servants of God in the same threefold sense. There is

naturally some overlap between each function, as the office is really one. I treat first the office of believer as prophet. Adam in the garden was God’s prophet. Man once spontaneously and instantly knew the truth of God by virtue of being created in God’s image. Man loved the truth, confessed the truth, and lived the truth in his original state of rectitude in paradise. He knew God rightly and loved him with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. Adam glorified God as creator and as his God and prostrated himself before God in worship and praise.

But when man fell, there was a radical change. The knowledge of God was completely lost. And so far did man fall that his knowledge and love of God and the truth not only were lost, but also they turned into the very opposite. Man became a false prophet who only ever speaks a lie about God. Man became a false prophet who stands now in the service of the devil. Through sin man is become a liar and one who only ever holds the truth of God down in unrighteousness. Man loves to speak the lie about who God is and what kind of God he is.

And one can trace man as a false prophet throughout all the sacred scriptures. At the tower of Babel man as a false prophet spoke the lie about himself that he could be god. Man revealed himself at the time of the flood when he rejected the word of God through Noah as the preacher of righteousness. In ultimate wickedness man rejected God’s Christ and his cross. The men of the circumcision in the apostle Paul’s day taught the lie of conditions, that the way of salvation was obedience to the law of Moses.

Then throughout church history, every man had a heresy about Christ: he was two persons; he was one nature; he was not a real man; he was not very God but just a great prophet. And man as a liar continued to speak a lie concerning God. The Arminian and Pelagian made God dependent upon the work of man in salvation. Man as the false prophet spoke proudly against the living God. The Christian Reformed man spoke the lie that God does good to the reprobate and that there is a well-meant offer of salvation to all who hear the preaching.

And today the roar of man as the false prophet can be heard as loudly as ever in the church world. Man divides God and clamors that God is only love and not righteousness—that he does countenance iniquity and tolerates sin. Man hollers that God desires the salvation of all and that Christ died for all men, but man must fulfill the conditions of faith and the obedience of faith. The shrill yell of man pierces the air, crying out for ecumenicity and toleration. And closest to us of all is the voice of the false prophet of the Protestant Reformed Churches that will not shut up about man and man’s working.

Let it be known that in the judgment God will finally and completely shut the mouth of the false prophet.

But by partaking of Christ's anointing by faith, the believer is changed into a true prophet of God. God himself instructs his prophets by his inspired word and by his powerful Spirit. God delivers us from the darkness of our understanding. He enlightens our minds by his grace, so that we have the true knowledge of God. He does that now in this life. What yet awaits us is the perfection of this knowledge in glory, when we shall see God and know God face to face in Jesus Christ as his true prophets. We shall know even as we are known.

But the knowledge of God that we have in this life is real knowledge of God as he has revealed himself. As true prophets, then, we confess God's name before men and show forth his praises, who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. And the believer does so anti-thetically, in the midst of his flesh and in a world that lies in darkness and ruin and that can only ever love the lie.

The prophetic dignity which is in Christians, is an understanding, acknowledgement and confession of the true doctrine of God necessary for our salvation. Or, our prophetic office is, 1. Rightly to know God and his will. 2. That every one in his place and degree profess the same, being correctly understood, faithfully, boldly and constantly, that God may thereby be celebrated, and his truth revealed in its living force and power. "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32.)<sup>1</sup>

The believer holds the word of God as a true prophet. God's word is the lamp unto the Christian's feet and the light upon his path. God's inspired word is the precious possession of the believer. What was taken away from the believer by Rome was restored by God in the Reformation.

The word is the content of the Christian's confession as a true prophet of Jesus Christ. The eternal Word is the only message that the true prophet speaks. The believer's confession is Jesus Christ as he was revealed in the garden as the great seed of the entire Old Testament. It was the seed that God promised over against all of the unfaithfulness of the nation of Israel. The confession of the believer is Jesus Christ, who personally came as the fulfillment of the gospel. The one confession is Jesus Christ and him crucified, who arose from the dead the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits now at God's

right hand and who will soon judge the quick and the dead.

The content of the Christian's confession cannot be worldly philosophy or seven steps to a successful life. The content cannot be what the believer dreams up in his own head because his own totally depraved flesh still only lies about God and the savior. The totally depraved nature of the believer cannot abide the truth. That is the explanation of doctrinal departure and why it is so shockingly easy to depart from the truth. The departure from the truth is in the flesh of man and ultimately rests in God's decree of election and reprobation, which he carries out infallibly.

The Spirit-filled believer as a true prophet of the living God speaks the truth over against the lie. He speaks right doctrine, as doctrine reveals what one knows, believes, and confesses about God. He speaks the doctrine of the one message of Jesus Christ as the one way of salvation. When the experience of the covenant is taught to be on the basis of Jesus Christ, by means of faith, and in the way of obedience, the believer refuses to abide in that church. When the experience of justification is not preached as by faith alone but by faith and repentance, denying Christ's perfect sacrifice that he once offered on the cross, the believer refuses to capitulate to the pressure to shut up about it. He will not tolerate the notion that in some sense man must precede God before God blesses man in his experience. As well as being disobedience against God, staying in such a church and refusing to condemn the lie of man give way to a great danger.

The public, written statements of unbelief and the public, oral outbursts could be made in part because these men knew they could not be censured. Truth had no objective standard. Repeatedly one reads that the majority agreed with the bold, unbelieving statements of the few. Unfaithful preachers had created throughout the churches a spiritual climate of indifference to doctrinal truth. People no longer perceived, nor were able to perceive, that the gospel of salvation had been removed from the life of the church.<sup>2</sup>

What was true of the state church in the Netherlands in 1834 is true of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) today. The office of prophet has all but disappeared in the PRC. A spiritual slumber has settled over the people as a result of unfaithful preaching and their own complacency. It is easier not to take any accountability and to say, "I trust the consistory" and "It is the job of

1 Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1852), 179.

2 Marvin Kamps, *1834: Hendrik De Cock's Return to the True Church* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 66.



the classis to handle that; it's not my business." Or, if one is roused for a moment and is forced to vaguely acknowledge that there is a problem, he says, "Yes, the assemblies are dealing with it, but the wheels of justice turn slowly." The people have willingly abandoned their offices and high callings from God in favor of lives of earthly peace. It is only by the grace of God that our eyes were opened and we were set free.

In this magazine men, women, young adults, and children read and write the truth. Reading and writing the truth are part of carrying out the office of prophet. Lamentably, both reading and writing are skills that are not in vogue today. Reading takes work and effort. It is an exercise of the mind, and it takes patience, discernment, and critical thinking to comprehend the meaning and sense of the author. And writing takes time, effort, critical thought, and above all else, prayer and meditation on the mysteries of faith. Reading and writing the truth are not popular compared to the mind-numbing behavior of watching and listening to the world's filth through ultra-high-definition televisions and mindlessly scrolling through the internet. All the world's entertainment would have us abandon this aspect of the office of prophet.

The believer carries out this office in his life daily. The believer studies the word and meditates on the word. The believer does so as a father leading his family in the study of that word around the dinner table or as a mother teaching to her young children the truth of God's word. Believers gather together as members of the body to discuss the truth of the word in Bible studies and societies. These societies, which are not established or mandated by the consistory but arise organically out of the members of the church, serve as a thermometer for the health of a congregation. When Bible studies are poorly attended or the members who do attend are poorly prepared, you must see in that the office of prophet being attacked. The believer as a prophet delights in the word, and in delighting in the word, he delights to gather around that word with fellow believers.

This all takes place in organic connection with the church and never outside the church. The gospel stands central for the doctrine of the office of all believer as that gospel is preached in the true church, which gospel preaching opens the pages of scripture and makes the word effectual in the lives of believers.

### *Protest and Appeal*

The believer also exercises his office as prophet in his right of a protest or an appeal. This may be the most important aspect of this office. The Christian does not

merely attend church, but in honor for Christ's office and ministry, he takes responsibility for what is preached and taught in his local church and, by implication, the denomination with which his church is federated.<sup>3</sup> The believer must demand the truth of the word of God off the pulpit and in the catechism room. The believer must hear Christ and only Christ, in all his person and work as the one in whom dwells all the fullness of God; and the believer must hear that man, including himself especially, is made nothing. And when there has been a failure to proclaim the gospel, it is the duty of the believer to speak, write, and confess the truth over against the lie that has been taught; and an avenue by which to do this is to write a protest.

It has been long established that in the churches we came out of this right of the believer to protest is nothing but a fruitless proposition. Protestants in the Protestant Reformed Churches who speak and write the truth in their office of all believer are often slanderously reported and vilified. Protests are bogged down for years under bureaucratic politicking. And every effort is taken to not deal with protests at the assemblies.

For years now Rev. Kenneth Koole's false doctrine has been allowed to fester, sizzle, and ferment away in the denomination. When we left the PRC three years ago, we were told that we should not have left and that Koole's theology was being dealt with. And when appeals regarding Koole's doctrine finally reached the Protestant Reformed Classis East in September 2023, half were thrown out on legality. And the classis made sure to studiously avoid entering into the doctrinal issues for the other half. How is it that protests and judgments take years finally to be made public and rendered while the man in question continues to preach his false doctrine to every church that lets him behind her pulpit? Not only have members willingly given up their office of prophet due to their own apathy, but members who do try to protest or appeal have their office stolen away in a sinister way. Protestant Reformed church polity requires many conditions and prerequisites before a doctrinal protest can be treated.

The irony of this all is that in a *Standard Bearer* article by Reverend Koole in 2017 on the office of all believer, he used the doctrine of the office of all believer to inject his conditional covenant theology into the PRC. Koole makes a mockery of God and the Spirit-filled office of all believer with the same conditional covenant theology that plagues the PRC, is propped up in his *Standard Bearer* articles promoting Herman Witsius, and is currently defended by Pete VanDer Schaaf. Koole does so by using

<sup>3</sup> Kamps, 1834, xv.

the doctrine of the office of all believer as an instrument to spread the lie. Referencing the veil that Rome sought to hang between God and his people, Koole pays lip service to the doctrine that we have access to the throne of grace by faith, but he reveals once again that he believes that faith is a work that man must do to have access to the Father.

The repenting, confessing, believing sinner regained direct access into the presence of God. All need for any special earthly priesthood to make ongoing sacrifices and intercession ended.<sup>4</sup>

How deceptive! The *repenting, confessing, believing* sinner regained direct access into the presence of God? No! The ungodly sinner, out of God's free and sovereign grace, is given direct access to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. The child of God has direct access to God by means of the spiritual union to his head Jesus Christ. He is made a partaker of Christ's anointing *by faith*. The office of all believer is a fruit of receiving the fullness of Jesus Christ. The believer is a prophet, and he must, may, can, and will confess the name of God in that office.

Material from Protestant Reformed assemblies continues to be hidden behind the curtain that the clergy have drawn to keep the people in the dark and so they will not ask questions, that the fire raging might not be seen by them. The distribution of the agenda and access to information has been curtailed by the clergy.

In 2018 a protest from Mr. Gordon Schipper came to the Protestant Reformed Classis East against a decision that was adopted to limit access of classical material to only special officebearers. He laid out the truth of the office of all believer in defense of the right of believers to have access to the classical agenda and supplemental material. The protestant argued that the office of believer was infringed upon. The classis sustained Mr. Schipper's protest, but today that has been shown to be meaningless to the denomination.

The Protestant Reformed Churches upheld his protest for a time; but not long after, the denomination went right back to hiding material and limiting access again, so that by January 2021 when the deposition of Rev. Andrew Lanning was on the docket, the Protestant Reformed political machine was chugging along at full speed. The deposition trial was treated in closed session because it was a matter of "sin," so that members of the church were not allowed to witness the deliberations on the matter. One member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church had received (unauthorized) access

to a classical agenda and was discussing it outside after church when an active officebearer accosted the man about how he had received the agenda and material. To read, have access to, and to judge public material pertaining to the church of Jesus Christ as a mere layman was sin. Not to mention the fact that the password on a locked officebearers' agenda has been "Lev19:16" which reads, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD." That is what the PRC thinks of the people: talebearers. Let that sink in for a moment. To have the classical agenda and to discuss it is to be a talebearer in the PRC.

A return to Rome, indeed. The office of all believer was hijacked by the Protestant Reformed clergy. And the PRC has completed the biggest heist of the twenty-first century. And if you say to me, "But they have distributed the agenda for this past classis," I will say to you that the PRC today picks and chooses when it wants to make material public to suit its interests.

The believer has the right to the classical agenda of the churches to which he has willingly bound himself. He has the right to study the material and to judge that material on the agenda, and he must make judgments. The believer who is filled with the Holy Spirit judges!

14. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.
15. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. (1 Cor. 2:14–15)

The things of the Spirit are salvation; therefore, the natural man perishes in his ignorance. The natural man has no ability, whether in the church or in the world, to judge spiritually. The reason is that the things of God are spiritually discerned. The meaning of the word "discerned" is *to judge*, and the idea is that a man who does not have the Spirit cannot judge spiritually. The evidence is that the natural man calls the things of the Spirit—salvation in Jesus Christ by faith alone—foolishness.

And the apostle gives a contrast in verse 15. He who does have the Spirit judges all things! And that one, as spiritual, is judged by no man but by the word of God alone. The believer who has the things of the Spirit and salvation in Jesus Christ judges *all* things. Nothing stands outside the scope of what the believer may judge according to the word of God. Nothing or no one may stand in the way of his making a judgment because he has the Spirit. That certainly includes classical agendas and material.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Koole, "The Reformation and the Restoration of the Office of All Believers," *Standard Bearer* 94, vol. 3 (November 1, 2017): 64.

Luther combatted the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church with the truth that the believer is a prophet and has the right and ability to judge doctrine.

Do you see how shamelessly and foolishly this boasting, [that only bishops, scholars, and councils should be allowed to judge doctrine] with which they intimidated the whole world and which is their highest stronghold and defense, rages against God's law and word?

Christ institutes the very opposite. He takes both the right and the power to judge teaching from the bishops, scholars, and councils and gives them to everyone and all Christians equally when he says, John 10[:4], "My sheep know my voice"...

Here you see clearly who has the right to judge doctrine: bishops, popes, scholars, and everyone else have the power to teach, but it is the sheep who are to judge whether they teach the voice of Christ or the voice of strangers...

For no one can deny that every Christian possesses the word of God and is taught and anointed by God to be priest, as Christ says, John 6[:45], "They shall all be taught by God"...

If it is true that they have God's word and are anointed by him, then it is their duty to confess, to teach, and to spread [his word].<sup>5</sup>

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:13, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak."

### *The Believer as Priest*

Second, the believer is anointed as priest. God transforms us into a holy priesthood, so that we become priests of God. He instills in our hearts the love of God. He cleanses us from the defilement of sin as a spiritual-ethical power. He consecrates us to himself in true holiness. And we shall be unto him a kingdom of priests, for we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people. This now in principle but hereafter in eternal glory with Christ, where the entire church shall become the perfect habitation of the living God.

In his commentary on Lord's Day 12, regarding the office of priest, Herman Hoeksema writes,

The Catechism describes the calling of believers as consisting in this, that they present themselves a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him. This evidently refers to their priestly office. To consecrate themselves, with soul and body, with all their heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; with all things, and in every department of life, in home, and school, and shop, and office, to the living God,—such is their calling as priests of the Most High, and that, too, in opposition to a world that devotes itself to the service of the devil and unrighteousness.<sup>6</sup>

Belgic Confession article 28 states, among other important things, that the office of all believer exists in connection with the local, instituted church. "It is the *duty of all believers*, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 61, emphasis added). This confession explains what scripture means when it adorns Christians with the honorable title of king-priests. This means, first, that the office of all believer cannot exist in separation from the instituted, true church of Jesus Christ. The witness of believers and the witness of the church are distinct, yet they cannot exist independently from one another. A true church of Jesus Christ will champion and uphold the office of all believer, as opposed to disparaging and despising the office. When *Sword and Shield* was first published, the leaders in the PRC did not trust—or were afraid of—the ability of believers to try the spirits and trampled that office underfoot. Neither may one claim to himself the office of all believer apart from the church, for the faith by which the believer is joined to Christ and partakes of Christ's anointing is strengthened and nourished in the church by the preaching of the gospel. The believer in his office joins himself to a true church where Christ speaks and saves. The Christian cannot stand to be apart from that church for even a moment! For Christ is his all in all, and the Christian must hear the royal priest himself speak of his sacrifice and intercession on the Christian's behalf before the Father.

Second, article 28 means that the Christian separates himself from all that is profane, for he is of a holy priesthood consecrated to God. The believer cannot stay in a church where Christ's perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice

5 Martin Luther, "That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture, 1523," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 39:306–7, 309.

6 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 1:573.

is mocked and blasphemed. Third, it means that where there is no true church, the believer in his office must reform the church, for that is his duty and obligation to God, being consecrated as a priest. Yea, even though he may lose his life for Christ.

The believer carries out his office as priest daily in coming before God in prayer. The believer has the privilege of coming before the throne of God to lay before God all the needs and cares of all God's people. The Christian prays for the afflicted. He prays for the king of the land, who may be wicked and profane, who may even persecute him. He speaks to God of all the needs of the church, the Christian day school, and the needs of his own family. As a priest, he makes supplication to God in the full assurance of faith for the sake of Jesus Christ and his shed blood on the cross.

Lord's Day 49 touches on the believer's office as priest when it speaks of our stations and callings. The mother, father, child, the single man or woman—in all areas of life and at every moment—all serve God in the stations and callings that God has given to them. They are consecrated to him in lives of thankful service as priests of the most high God. The man and woman who daily work with their hands and think with their minds; the father who provides for the needs of his family that he might give to support the gospel ministry and the Christian school; the mother who cares for her children and keeps the home; the child who learns in the school and plays with other children of the covenant, labor before the Lord as priests. Never can the Christian section off his life as a priest. Our lives are wholly consecrated to God in thankful service for the great work that God wrought in *the* great high priest, Jesus Christ. That is true freedom: freedom to serve the Lord all your life.

The office of all believer is one to be used diligently and faithfully in the church. Every child of God is a partaker of Christ's anointing, so that he may serve God in the body of Jesus Christ as that universal body is manifested in the local, instituted, true church. The believer has the calling to use his gifts in his office for the benefit of the body.

Q. 55. What do you understand by “the communion of saints”?

A. First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are, in common, partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 104)

Bavinck also explains the connection between the office of priest and the communion of saints when he writes,

The congregation is not voiceless; it is not a “listening church” or an “economic order” whose role is to listen and be silent. But it has “an anointing from the Holy One” (1 John 1:20), consists of many members who all need one another, and may not neglect the gifts given them.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Believer as King*

Finally, the believer is a king. Jesus Christ is our eternal king, and he constitutes us as a royal people and a nation of kings under God with him. As king, the believer is at war. All believers are soldiers of Jesus Christ, and in Christ's army on this earth there are no retired or neutralized soldiers. The battle for the believer rages on from the moment he is born until he takes his last breath. He wars against Satan, the world, and his own sin and sinful flesh with a free and good conscience, that afterward he will reign with Christ eternally over all creatures.

As kings, we have the victory of Jesus Christ by faith. We have that now in principle. And we await the perfection of that victory when at Christ's return our souls are completely delivered and our bodies are raised from the dead. As we fight then in this life, we fight as victors going forth in the battle against all the hosts of darkness in the assurance that the captain of our salvation has wrought the deliverance. We are more than conquerors through him that loved us, so that even as we suffer and are still engaged in this deadly combat, we fight on as kings in the army of Jehovah God.

The believer has a say in the government of the church. The believer directs the current officebearers to qualified men who ought to be put up for nomination—men who are filled with the Holy Spirit. The believer votes in the church, guided by the Holy Spirit, that the man of God's choosing might be placed into office. Luther proves that this is both scriptural and Reformed:

No bishop should institute anyone without the election, will, and call of the congregation. Rather, he should confirm the one whom the congregation chose and called...Neither Titus nor Timothy nor Paul ever instituted a priest without the congregation's election and call. This is clearly proven in sayings in Titus 1[:7] and I Timothy 3[:10], “A bishop or priest should be blameless,” and, “Let the deacons be tested first.” Now Titus could not have known which ones were blameless; such a report must

<sup>7</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 4:375.

come from the congregation, which must name the man.<sup>8</sup>

The believer is a king in the church of Jesus Christ, and his office must be allowed to operate freely in the rule and government of the church.

### *The Special Offices*

The treatment of the office of all believer would not be complete if I did not treat, albeit briefly, the special offices in the church. The special offices are distinct roles to which men are called and installed. The special offices in the church are the offices of minister, deacon, and elder. And these offices arise in organic connection with the office of all believer.

The office of all believers is the spiritual fountain of all the church's organic activity and its instituted form. The special offices of pastor, elder, and deacon arise in the church through the office of all believers, and by these special offices the true king of the church, Christ Jesus, exercises his royal rule according to his word and by his Spirit. The office of all believers stimulates and causes the special offices to come into being.<sup>9</sup>

The minister as a prophet is to speak the word of the Lord to God's people. From week to week he must sound forth unashamedly the gospel of free forgiveness in Jesus Christ. As king, the elder is to rule in the church of Jesus Christ according to the word. As priest, the deacon is to show mercy to the flock of Christ in the collection and distribution of the alms. The minister, elder, and deacon are servants to the sheepfold of Christ. These offices are not special in the sense that those who hold the special office are higher, more important, or more powerful than the lay member of the church. Rather, the word *special* designates that there is a specific labor and work to which those who hold those offices are called.

To conclude I leave the reader with insightful truths from our spiritual forefathers, who held the office of all believer in great esteem.

It is true, also in the new dispensation after the Spirit was poured out, the Lord has instituted

his church. And for the upbuilding of the saints he gave unto her apostles, prophets, evangelists, ministers, elders, and deacons. But although these are given to the church for the edifying of the body of Christ, this does not mean that believers are now wholly dependent upon an institution of men for the knowledge of the Lord and for the proper functioning of their spiritual life. They are free; all have the Spirit. All have the unction of the Holy One...For all know him, from the least to the greatest. And if a certain institution of the church in the world would become deformed, wicked men are in high places, the truth is corrupted, and the holy things of God's covenant are profaned, the church, the true spiritual remnant, is in a position to exercise the office of believers, separate themselves from that false church, and institute the true church anew.<sup>10</sup>

We thank God for preserving and restoring to us the office of all believer in the reformation of 2021 and the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches. May the Lord preserve us as believers in the Reformed Protestant Churches in the truth of this doctrine of the office of all believer. For it is a glorious doctrine.

For this reason our fathers devoutly spoke of an *office of all believers*. In Christ's Church there are not merely a few officials and a mass of idle, unworthy subjects, but every believer has a calling, a task, a vital charge. And inasmuch as we are convinced that we perform the task because the King has laid it upon us not for ourselves, nor even from the motive of philanthropy, but to *serve the Church*, to this extent has our work an *official* character, although the world denies us the honor.<sup>11</sup>

Why are you called a Christian? Because you are a member of Christ by faith, and thus—as a fruit—are a partaker of Christ's anointing to the office of all believer as a prophet, priest, and king.

Such is the office of all believer!

—TDO

8 Luther, *Luther's Works*, 39:312.

9 Kamps, 1834, 9.

10 Herman Hoeksema, *I Believe: Sermons on the Apostles' Creed*, ed. Marco Barone (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2023), 241.

11 Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 183.

*Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.—1 Timothy 4:13*

## SACRIFICES (5): THE SACRIFICIAL MATERIAL

*And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. — Leviticus 1:1–2*

### *Do We Even Care?*

**W**hy cattle? Why must the Levitical sacrifice come from among the herd or the flock?

*Cattle* designates the genus under which is subsumed both herd and flock animals. The herd animals in view were oxen (also known in the King James Version as *beeves*, a beef creature), both the males (bullocks) and the females (heifers). The flock animals in view were goats and sheep, both males and females. Only from among these clean<sup>1</sup> and domesticated animals were sacrifices permitted. Domesticated but unclean animals—such as asses, camels, and swine—were prohibited as sacrifices. Game animals that were clean and edible—such as the hare, stag, roebuck, and gazelle—were likewise prohibited. Two kinds of clean birds, a turtledove and a young pigeon, were permitted for certain sacrifices in the place of cattle, but these birds were given to the impoverished Israelite who could not bring the normal offering.<sup>2</sup>

Why cattle? This is the question that we must consider before we enter into the specifics of the five sacrifices that Jehovah prescribed to Moses in the opening chapters of Leviticus.

And there is only one reason that we care to consider this question.

This one reason stands over against the barren curiosity of a host of unbelieving biblical scholars. For them the

inquiry into why Israel used cattle and birds as sacrifices is interesting in its own right. Such scholars talk about how the selection of sacrificial material reflected the limited natural means and commodities that were at the Israelites' disposal as they traveled through the wilderness and settled in the land of Canaan. These scholars ramble on about how Israel adopted certain aspects of its sacrificial system from the cultus of heathen nations with whom Israel had contact—deceitful nonsense. They make of no significance that *Jehovah* prescribed these animals as sacrifices, calling unto Moses from God's royal judgment seat upon the ark, shrouded by his cloud of glory and the wings of golden cherubim.

But it is not difficult to see that this material requirement of oxen and goats and sheep and turtledoves and young pigeons was God's choice for sacrificial animals *from the beginning*. If we look backward in time from Sinai, we come first to the eve of Israel's departure from Egypt, wherein the passover lamb was slaughtered and its blood pasted on the doorposts of the Israelites' dwellings. (Let me briefly interrupt here and point out that a *lamb* frequently refers to a youngling of the flock, either of the sheep or of the goats, as is evident from the description of the passover lamb in Exodus 12:5: "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats.") Isaac was also

1 "Clean" means that it was lawful to eat these animals. The law concerning what animals were clean and edible is found in Leviticus 11 and in Deuteronomy 14:2–21.

2 That a turtledove or a young pigeon may be used by the poor instead of cattle illustrates the extreme earthly poverty into which Christ our Lord willingly came. When the days of Mary's purification under the Mosaic law had been fulfilled, Joseph and Mary brought the young child Jesus to Jerusalem "to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, *A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons*" (Luke 2:24, emphasis added). Edersheim notes that "while a lamb would cost about three shillings, the average value of a pair of turtledoves... would be about eightpence [about four to five times less than the lamb]" (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993], 137). Though according to his person the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God and the cattle on a thousand hills belong to him, he became poor—assuming to himself our miserable state and destitute condition under the curse of the law—so that we might be exceedingly rich in grace and all spiritual blessings.

accustomed to seeing a lamb offered as a sacrifice, since he asked his father in the land of Moriah, “Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Gen. 22:7). And in Isaac’s stead God provided a ram from among all the creatures of the earth. In Genesis 15 when God gave to Abraham that grand symbol and vision of the unilateral establishment of God’s covenant, do you remember what animals God required Abraham to slaughter and part so that God could walk between them? The animals were a heifer, a she-goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon—the same animals that God specified to Moses at Sinai. Noah offered sacrifices to Jehovah of the clean cattle and fowl that in the ark passed through the cataclysm of the flood. Abel brought the firstlings of his flock. And we may even surmise that the animal skins that God used to clothe the nakedness of Adam and Eve had come from the slaughter of herd or flock animals. It was always these distinct animals that belonged to the sacrifices of the old dispensation. God chose these creatures for sacrifices according to his infinite wisdom and eternal counsel. God is one in will and purpose.

God prescribed these animals, giving a visible word concerning the only suitable substitute who could bear the iniquities of his people. Here we arrive at the sole reason that we have any interest in such a study. What we behold in the bulls and goats is a shadow of a *body*. This subject of sacrificial animals is not glorious in itself. There is nothing particularly interesting about a shadow except that the shadow belongs to a body, and that body is not just *some* body but a *glorious* body. If I fall under the shadow of a peasant, I hardly take notice; but if I fall under the shadow of a king... And shadows were cast long into the Old Testament, but they began to fade and grow shorter as the one who cast that shadow drew near: the image of the invisible God; the firstborn from the dead, by whom and for whom all things were made; the elect, concerning whom God decreed, “Let all my fullness dwell in him bodily, for he shall be the perfect revelation of my glory, and in him will my name dwell.” Unbelief stares blindly at mere beasts and perceives not the glorious body that cast such a shadow into the old dispensation. But God gave these creatures as sacrifices to typify and symbolically represent the Christ.

Further, in the revealing of the only suitable substitute who could bear the iniquities of his people through bulls and goats, God spoke the gospel concerning the righteousness of God. Frankly, if the material used for sacrifices cannot confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel, then my writing and your reading are vain and wasted efforts. But indeed, these things speak the gospel of the righteousness of God. This righteousness to which I refer is not that divine perfection of God’s glorious and eternal being according to which his willing and acting are always in

complete harmony with his own infinite goodness by his own irreproachable judgment. The righteousness of God to which I refer is that righteousness of Romans 3:21–22:

21. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;
22. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.

It is that otherworldly righteousness that God worked out in his Son, Jesus Christ, by his incarnation and lifelong obedience unto the suffering of death. It is a righteousness that belongs, first, to the reality that God imputed unto Christ, as head of God’s covenant, all the sins of its members, so that Christ became the embodiment of all that is loathsome to God and suffered the penalty of death. Furthermore, it is that heavenly righteousness that God imputes unto the ungodly but elect sinner wholly apart from any of his own working or willing. It is that glorious righteousness that simply cannot be increased because the covenant head rendered unto God all the love and obedience that God was due. It is that everlasting righteousness that cannot be marred or corrupted or touched by any of that elect sinner’s gross disobedience. In the light of the one who was to become this righteousness and who was to be manifest in the fullness of time, God prescribed cattle to be slaughtered.

Thus I liken this study of the sacrificial material to Lord’s Days 5 and 6 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the first two Lord’s Days under the second section, which concerns itself with man’s deliverance. These two Lord’s Days sketch an outline or silhouette of a perfect man by searching out what sort of mediator and deliverer we must seek for in light of the justice of God. And the climax of these Lord’s Days is that grand answer to the question, “Who then is that Mediator?” “Our Lord Jesus Christ” (Q&A 18, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 89).

Let us then proceed and consider the question, why cattle?

### *A Soulsh Creature*

Satisfaction of God’s justice for sin requires the shedding of blood. This is exactly what scripture teaches when it says that “without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins” (Heb. 9:22). But when we speak of *blood* in connection with the satisfaction of divine justice, we must not have in mind merely the red fluid that spills from a body that is pierced or cut. Rather, we must think of the *life* that has been offered through the shedding of blood. When blood has been shed, a life has passed under the sentence of death.

God provided *animals* as the sacrificial material because,

unlike the rest of the brute creation, animals are soulish creatures that possess their life in their blood. Animals have a soul, a soulish life. Permit me to use the word *soul-life*.<sup>3</sup> According to this reality animals not only are distinct from the realm of plants, but animals also bear a resemblance to earthly man, so that they can stand in a relationship with earthly man. Certainly, the soul-life of an animal is not as deep as the soul-life of a man, for the soul-life of an animal has no spiritual relationship with its creator as a man does. (I shall have more to say on this momentarily.) Nonetheless, animals possess a soul-life, and that soul-life is found in their blood. This fact is evident in God's instruction to Noah after the flood:

3. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.
4. But flesh with the life thereof, *which is the blood thereof*, shall ye not eat. (Gen. 9:3–4, emphasis added)

This fact is also evident in God's instruction to Moses at Sinai:

10. And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people.
11. *For the life of the flesh is in the blood*: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. (Lev. 17:10–11, emphasis added)

When scripture forbade the consuming of blood, it also made clear that an animal's soul-life was in the blood.

Therefore, the animal was a creature that could undergo *death*. When its blood was spilled during slaughter, the life poured out of that creature and was spent. Though God also prescribed vegetable offerings for the altar, these bloodless sacrifices never stood independent from the bloody sacrifice of an animal.<sup>4</sup> In the sacrifices

God provided blood to his people, to make symbolic atonement therewith for their souls upon the altar and to testify of the gospel that another would undergo the sentence of death and the bitter experience of death in the place of his people.

We must pause here and reflect on that last sentence. Let me say, "Selah."

When God provided sacrificial animals, whose blood could be shed and who could taste death instead of the sinner, God through Moses gave to his people a heavenly and divine thought. Such a thought no wise man could have ever dreamt up. The fact that there *is* another who can bear a man's guilt and be punished in man's stead belongs solely to the proclamation of the gospel, which gospel *God* conceived and *God* revealed and *God* worked for his own eternal glory and honor. Such a thought is otherworldly, for all that man can know of himself is that God burns in anger against all man's unrighteousness and ungodliness. All that man can know of himself is that he daily increases his debt. All that man can do of himself is to flee in terror from before the presence of Jehovah and attempt to cover up his nakedness by his own carnal works, which works only further offend the most high majesty of God. But God, through the giving of an animal to be slaughtered, instilled into the elect sinner's mind—a mind and conscience burdened with the damning testimony and work of the law—a wondrously new and gracious and mighty and peaceful thought: "I, who am by nature an enemy of God, can escape punishment! I do not need to pay for my sins! There is *another* who can bear my guilt before the face of God, undergo the sentence of death, and spill out its life by bloodshed." For what saith scripture? "Jehovah called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto me..." That is a heavenly and divine thought! For man on his part declared war against the living and eternal God and made God man's enemy by his own willful disobedience. But God is not only willing that this enmity be overcome, but God is also the one who from before the foundation of the world determined how he would overcome this

3 The Hebrew word in this instance would be *nephesh*, which the King James Version translates as "life" or "soul" or "creature." Here are a few examples: "God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature [*nephesh*] after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so" (Gen. 1:24); "To every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life [*nephesh*], I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so" (v. 30); "O deliver not the soul [*nephesh*] of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked" (Ps. 74:19); "A righteous man regardeth the life [*nephesh*] of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. 12:10).

4 This fact is contested. For example, C. F. Keil argues that the meat offering (which, contrary to the suggested connotation of its name, was a bloodless, vegetable offering) was sometimes presented at the altar by itself without an accompanying blood offering (See C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *The Pentateuch* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996], 504ff.). I will defend my position in a future article on the meat offering, Lord willing, but for now let it be asserted that bloodless or vegetable sacrifices were significant inasmuch as they accompanied the bloody sacrifice of animals.



enmity. At Sinai God gave Moses the animal as a type to show how in the fullness of time God would be in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing the trespasses of his elect unto them. Through the sacrifices God gave a visible word for how he would accomplish this: it required the giving of a life through the shedding of blood.

Since death is the wages for sin, the consequence of bearing sin before the presence of the Holy One is that the sinner must be cut off from the land of the living and undergo the suffering of penal death. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us, God's justice "requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul" (A 11, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 87). And when God prescribed animal sacrifices, he testified that there is another who can stand in the sinner's place and undergo the horrors of death. God forgives sin that offends his majesty only by satisfaction, only by a bloody death, and only a soulish creature—whose life is in its blood—could symbolically and typically represent this.

### *An Innocent Creature*

But why an *animal*? Permit me to entertain a little folly and ask, why not a *human* sacrifice?

First, God gave clear prohibition of human sacrifices elsewhere in the law. When Moses reiterated the law before the entering of Canaan, he warned Israel against searching out how the other nations served their gods. The practices of those nations whom God would destroy were an abomination to him, and "even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods" (Deut. 12:31).

But we may say more. God provided sacrificial material that symbolized *innocent* blood.

Both men and animals have an existence on this side of the grave that is earthly and conducted through the senses of their bodies. But an animal's soul-life is *entirely* earthly and non-spiritual. Man, on the other hand, also has to do with God. Man is unique above the creatures because man has a spiritual side to his soul-life. According to God's twofold act of forming man from the dust of the earth and breathing into man the breath of life, man stands related to the earth and related to God. Man cannot ever escape God. Man stands either in friendship with God and is blessed by God, or man stands at enmity against God and is cursed by God. Man always has to do with God. When an animal is slaughtered and the blood drained from its body, then that animal ceases to exist. There is no heaven for cats and dogs. But man is different. You can drain all my blood and destroy my body, yet that spiritual aspect of my soul does not perish. When man's

earthly life ceases, his soul is violently separated from his body, and either his soul is purged by the God who justifies him, and he goes to be with God in heaven; or he is cast into hell by the God who condemns him, and he suffers death everlastingly.

Since animals do not bear this spiritual relationship to their creator, they can be reckoned as non-moral and, in an entirely negative way, as *innocent*. Though not ethically holy and positively obedient and righteous, yet animals cannot become morally corrupt and be punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul. They cannot bear the image of God or the image of the devil. God made the sacrificial material stand out as innocent in the mind of the Israelite who presented it for a sacrifice. No sacrificial material from among the human race could have provided such a testimony. None are righteous, no not one. Man's nature had become so corrupt that he was conceived and born in sin and wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness. Even the priests needed daily to offer up sacrifices, first for themselves and then for the people. The blood of the sacrifice must be innocent blood.

This innocence was also manifest in that the animal's condition must be pure and without blemish. The sacrificial material could not be blind, crippled, cut or mutilated in any way, or exhibit scabs or itching sores or ulcers ("having a wen" [Lev. 22:22]). The animal could not be emasculated. It could not have any deformity or abnormality.

God gave sacrificial material to his people that was innocent and pure, for this innocence and purity belong to the heart of the gospel.

This is scripture's word in the New Testament:

18. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;
19. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb *without blemish and without spot*. (1 Pet. 1:18–19, emphasis added)

And again,

13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:
14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself *without spot* to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:13–14, emphasis added)

This belongs to the gospel of the apostles. Paul declared to those in Antioch's synagogue concerning Jesus Christ

that the rulers of Jerusalem “found no cause of death in him” (Acts 13:28). What is necessary for the church of all ages to know? Christ was perfectly innocent! Without spot and without blemish. A pure blood. He “did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22).

Innocent blood means that the sacrifice to come must have no actual sins. And Christ was very conscious of his own sinlessness. He challenged those who opposed him, “Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?” (John 8:46). Innocent blood also means that the sacrifice to come must not be liable to the original guilt of Adam. Christ could not belong to the corporation of Adam. And how this could be belonged to the wonder of grace that was revealed in the fullness of time. Adam was not Christ’s head because Jesus Christ did not have a human person. Guilt is always imputed to the person. It was impossible that Adam’s guilt be imputed to Christ’s person, for he it is who descends from heaven and whose person is otherworldly and divine. Furthermore, Mary’s womb was a place of death, as is every other womb. Every other sibling of Christ begotten by Joseph and conceived in Mary was corrupt. In the womb of Mary, part of the ineffable and inconceivable wonder is that God brought the clean out of the unclean. The Holy Spirit kept Jesus Christ as that holy thing. Jesus emerged from that septic tank of the womb clean and spotless by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Innocent blood. This was brought to light in Christ’s

trial. God made man acknowledge this. In the Praetorium God put the world on trial, though man tried vigorously to avoid it. The Jews did not want to bring Jesus into the public courts. The Jews wanted to do away with Jesus in secret. But God would have that court date, and so Christ forced the Jews into action by sending Judas away. And Pilate wanted nothing with that case. “Try Jesus in your own courts! Send him away to Herod!” But God would have his Son’s innocence stand out clearly in the minds of all. Thrice Pilate declared in judgment, “I find no fault in him.”

No fault. *Nothing* at all to condemn him. Let that sink in. Who among men could receive such a verdict? Who among men would willingly subject himself—did Jesus not go willingly with his captors?—for a meticulous scrutiny for any vice by a world at enmity against him? Innocent blood.

God forgives sin that offends his majesty only by satisfaction, only by a bloody death, and only an innocent and soulful creature could symbolically and typically represent this.

Thus far we have seen the need for an *animal* to symbolically make the required satisfaction of God’s divine justice. Yet we have not arrived at the precise reason for *cattle*. However, the deadline to submit this article for editing and typesetting has come upon me, so this will have to wait for next time.

—LB

## RUNNING FOOTMEN

*And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.—Leviticus 26:7*

# THE CONTROVERSY OF LORDSHIP SALVATION

Having recently listened to a sermon by Sonny Hernandez, a past contributor to *Sword and Shield*, I was struck by the similarities between the lordship-salvation controversy in the evangelical Arminian churches of our day and the controversy that resulted in the birth of the Reformed Protestant Churches. In his sermon Hernandez quotes mostly from *The Gospel According to Jesus*, a book written by John F. MacArthur

that was originally published in 1988, which appears to be the textbook for the doctrine of lordship salvation.

In response to *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Zane C. Hodges wrote a book titled *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. Before I address the theology espoused in each book, I remind the reader that neither MacArthur nor Hodges, who has since died, can rightly be characterized as a minister of the gospel. While Hodges

was much more hostile toward the gospel and held a particular disdain for what he called “Dortian Calvinism,” MacArthur is likely more dangerous. MacArthur claims Calvinism, while at the same time he denies the power of God in salvation and inserts man’s works into salvation, specifically man’s work of “accepting Christ.”

Lordship salvation arose as a response to “easy-believism.” MacArthur contends that

the gospel in vogue today holds forth a false hope to sinners. It promises them they can have eternal life yet continue to live in rebellion against God. Indeed, it *encourages* people to claim Jesus as Savior yet defer until later the commitment to obey him as Lord...By separating faith from faithfulness, it teaches that intellectual assent is as valid as wholehearted obedience to the truth.

Thus the good news of Christ has given way to the bad news of an insidious easy-believism that makes no moral demands on the lives of sinners.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of this “easy-believism” is described by MacArthur when he states,

The cheap grace and pseudo faith of a distorted gospel are ruining the purity of the church. The softening of the New Testament message has brought with it a putrefying inclusivism that in effect sees almost any kind of positive response to Jesus as tantamount to saving faith.<sup>2</sup>

By quoting some statements of the antinomian-Arminian theologians of the evangelistic movement, MacArthur makes the case that a response to the gospel is necessary for salvation. He quotes from R. B. Thieme’s *The Pursuit of Happiness*:

It is possible, even probable, that when a believer falls for certain types of philosophy, if he is a logical thinker, he will become an “unbelieving believer.” Yet believers who become agnostics are still saved; they are still born again. You can even become an atheist; but if you once accept Christ as savior, you cannot lose your salvation, even though you deny God.<sup>3</sup>

The above quotations and examples, as well as our own personal experiences, can lead us to trust that a lack of holiness is a real problem in evangelical churches. This same problem is present in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and was often given as the justification for the

doctrinal departures by Rev. David Overway and the consistory of Hope Protestant Reformed Church. After the 2018 decision of the Protestant Reformed synod and by the sudden “repentance” of the officebearers of Classis East and of Hope’s consistory, these men finally acknowledged that Overway had in fact displaced the perfect work of Christ and had given works a place in salvation, but these men often justified Reverend Overway by saying that he was “concerned with the holy life of the church.”

When I was a member of the Protestant Reformed Churches, the problem that MacArthur describes as “easy-believism” was present in the denomination. A man could be a member of a labor union, join a Protestant Reformed church, and the only thing he had to give up was his union card. He could maintain friendly relationships with his family and friends in the union and never had to condemn their sins or lose father, mother, sisters, brethren, or children for Christ’s sake. Men and women could date whomever they wanted, as long as the future spouse would make confession of faith, usually a month before the wedding just to avoid making a commitment to the truth before it was required. A man could join the Protestant Reformed Churches from the United Reformed Churches, and the only thing he had to change was which building contained the pew he warmed every Sunday. At family visitation the elders were sure to encourage you that you were, in fact, suffering for the gospel’s sake if sometimes your coworkers made jokes at your expense or thought you were strange because of your practices.

In the Reformed Protestant Churches, we are tempted to believe that we do not have to give up our unbelieving families, our unbelieving friends, and our places in the world. We can continue to go on vacation with them. We can continue to have them at our houses, to fellowship, and to carefully tiptoe around the doctrinal issues that separate us. Almost nothing is easier for us than denying the antithesis, either by words or actions. The false solution to “easy-believism” we also find familiar. All that is needed is to give works a place in salvation.

In MacArthur’s case, he sets his sights squarely on the assurance of the believer. He writes,

Professing Christians utterly lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance of salvation...

Genuine assurance comes from seeing the Holy Spirit’s transforming work in one’s life,

1 John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, “Follow Me”?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), ebook, so there are no page numbers.

2 MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

3 R. B. Thieme, *Apes and Peacocks or The Pursuit of Happiness* (Houston: Thieme, 1973), 23, quoted in *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

not from clinging to the memory of some experience.<sup>4</sup>

But just as with the ministers in the Protestant Reformed Churches, God did not leave himself without a witness. Just as God forced Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge God as God, God forced MacArthur to acknowledge Christ's work as the only ground and foundation of salvation. For example, in speaking of Christ's words, "It is finished," MacArthur writes,

Here it is appropriate to add a crucial footnote: When Jesus said, "It is finished," he meant it. Nothing can be added to what he did. Many people believe they must supplement his work with good deeds of their own. They believe they must facilitate their own redemption through baptism, other sacraments and religious rituals, benevolent deeds, or whatever else they can accomplish through their own efforts. But no works of human righteousness can expand on what Jesus accomplished for us. "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5). The beginning and the end of our salvation was consummated by Jesus Christ, and we can contribute nothing.<sup>5</sup>

The problem with MacArthur's solution is that he is entirely devoid of the gospel. We can see this from his definition of the gospel: "The message is simply that God graciously saves repentant sinners who come to him in faith."<sup>6</sup> By conditioning salvation upon repentance, MacArthur seeks to scare people into living godly lives and lives of repentance. In fact, this is the entire premise of MacArthur's book. Salvation is only for those who not only accept Christ as their savior but who also consciously make him Lord in their lives. MacArthur looks over a church that is void of fruit, and his solution is not to bring Christ, the vine that makes his branches fruitful; but MacArthur's solution is to try to scare, threaten, and convince the dead branches to bring forth fruit.

In response to MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Zane C. Hodges wrote *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Response to Lordship Salvation*. I had anticipated that Hodges' book would be better than *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Although comparing the two books can be

likened to determining which of two pit latrines smells less offensive, I have come to the conclusion that Hodges' book is worse.

Hodges begins with the lament that "instead of recognizing the freeness of God's saving love, many encumber it with conditions."<sup>7</sup> He bemoans the state of the church and the teachers of his day, whom he describes as teaching conditions.

According to them, if a person wonders whether he is a Christian or not, he ought to be told to look for evidence of this in his behavior.

It is dangerous, these teachers assert, to offer someone the assurance that they are accepted with God apart from the issue of obedience. For them, there is no such thing as an unconditional love of God that is not, in some way, performance-related.<sup>8</sup>

Hodges also correctly asserts that "instead of promoting holiness, the doctrine of lordship salvation destroys the very foundation upon which true holiness must be built. By returning to the principles of the law, it has forfeited the spiritual power of grace."<sup>9</sup> His analysis of the problem is spot-on:

In the process, the marvelous truth of justification by faith, apart from works, recedes into shadows not unlike those which darkened the days before the Reformation. What replaces this doctrine is a kind of faith/works synthesis which differs only insignificantly from official Roman Catholic dogma.<sup>10</sup>

In a particularly poignant observation, Hodges remarks,

What is wrong in lordship thought is that a life of good works is made the basis of assurance, so that the believer's eyes are distracted from the sufficiency of Christ and His Cross to meet his eternal need. Instead, his eyes are focused on himself. The Reformers understood that there was no assurance in that kind of process at all.<sup>11</sup>

So how does Hodges' book earn the title of the more offensive of the two books? All of the statements above were near the end of the first chapter of the book. In the second chapter Hodges writes, "In fact, it is statements

4 MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

5 MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

6 MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

7 Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 17.

8 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 18.

9 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 18.

10 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 19–20.

11 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 215.

like this one ["Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47)] that show how anxious God is to make His offer of salvation plain."<sup>12</sup> Hodges looks at a text like John 6:47 and all he can see is an anxious god, trying to make his offer of salvation. Later Hodges states, "The Bible predicates salvation on an *act* of faith, not on the *continuity* of faith."<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere in his book, Hodges expresses his disdain for the theology that regeneration precedes faith, that Christ died only for the elect, that God loves only the elect, and that those who depart from the faith never had true faith. His book makes clear in many places that Hodges hates the doctrines of Calvinism. Regarding the theology that the believer does good works out of his regenerated heart in thankfulness to God, Hodges writes,

Today there exists in part of the evangelical church a wholly unrealistic view of the nature of Christian experience. According to those who hold this view, effective Christian living is virtually an inevitable result of new birth. But this view is as remote from the Bible as east is remote from the west.

Of course, it is a miraculous truth that at the moment of new birth, the very life of God is imparted to the believer. But like the impartation of physical life itself, spiritual life is not granted in fully developed form. It does not come to us in a prefabricated condition.

On the contrary, regeneration brings with it immense capacities and staggering possibilities. But all these capabilities, come, so to speak, not in their ripened maturity, but in the form of a "seed" which requires cultivation.<sup>14</sup>

For Hodges sanctification is not an inevitable result of justification. For Hodges regeneration brings "immense capacities" and "staggering possibilities." In taking issue with MacArthur's statement that "obedience is the inevitable manifestation of saving faith," Hodges must come up with his own basis for the good works that the believer will do. Also, one of Hodges' problems with lordship salvation is its association with Calvinism.

Frequently (though not always) lordship salvation is combined with a harsh system of thought that denies the reality of God's love for every

single human being. According to this kind of theology, God dooms most men to eternal damnation long before they are born and really gives His Son to die only for the elect.<sup>15</sup>

Hodges finally comes to the heart of his false doctrine when he gets to repentance. Hodges' theology speaks for itself:

Thus, though genuine repentance *may* precede salvation (as we shall see), it *need not* do so. And because it is not essential to the saving transaction as such, it is in no sense a condition for that transaction. But the fact still remains that God demands repentance from all and He conditions their *fellowship with Him* on that.<sup>16</sup>

Hodges begins by exposing his low view of repentance, stating that repentance is something that an unregenerated person can do. Hodges is not bold enough to make repentance a condition unto salvation, but he makes it a condition for the experience of one's salvation. Regarding Christ's statement in Luke 5:31–32, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," Hodges explains, "That is what repentance is all about. It is all about the sinner finding spiritual health. It is all about the sinner 'sitting at the table'—having fellowship—with God."<sup>17</sup> Hodges even makes repentance the basis upon which God can fellowship with sinful men: "Harmony—fellowship—between a sinful humanity and a forgiving God must always be based on repentance, just as justification must always be based on faith alone."<sup>18</sup>

How does all of this relate to us? As we have seen, this "easy-believism" is a threat to us as long as we are in this flesh. While Hodges mocks MacArthur's response to "easy-believism" by calling it "hard-believism," neither one is the correct view. To be sure, the gospel is "impossible-believism," so that apart from the efficacious call of Christ, drawing us to the gospel, no one has the right nor the ability to believe. We know that believing must spring from faith as its fruit. MacArthur and Hodges view believing (which for them is analogous to accepting Christ) and faith as synonymous and as something that the hearer has to do in his own power. Since neither MacArthur nor Hodges has any idea of what true faith is, neither one can properly explain where the works produced by faith come

12 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 215.

13 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 63.

14 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 69.

15 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 85–86.

16 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 146.

17 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 149.

18 Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, 151.

from. Both men needed to come up with an explanation and a source for the good works that they knew had to be present in the church, and both went to man's wisdom to find a way to produce those good works. Hodges' exposition of the lordship salvation advocates' position is very accurate: they combine law and grace and deny the distinction between the law and the gospel. And that position is not far from us. In 2017 the Protestant Reformed synod took a decision that stated, "Properly done, the preaching of the law *is* the preaching of the gospel."<sup>19</sup> And in 2002, in a book review in the *Standard Bearer* on another book written in response to MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Prof. H. Hanko wrote,

Without entering into them in this review, I am troubled by the fact that the book, in its otherwise strong defense of justification by faith alone, makes a false disjunction between law and gospel so that lost from sight is the obvious truth that Scripture considers the law, at least in some sense, to be gospel as well.<sup>20</sup>

The heresy espoused in the doctrine of lordship salvation has been in the Protestant Reformed Churches, and

therefore in us, for some time now. Although God has delivered us from the Protestant Reformed Churches, we must be on guard against the heresy of lordship salvation, as well as the heresies espoused by Hodges in his doctrine of "free grace." There is no situation in which any benefit of salvation may be hinged upon any work of the believer.

Finally, we can see, as *Sword and Shield* has previously demonstrated, that the truth of the place of good works in the life of the believer does not lie between two ditches. We do not find truth by threading the theological needle between the false doctrines of Hodges and MacArthur. We can see that both the legalism of MacArthur and Hodges' denial of sanctification both arise out of the same Arminian error. As at the time of the Synod of Dordt, antinomianism is the charge of the Arminian. Recognizing the bitter fruit of his false doctrine, the heretic blames the truth and charges it as antinomian.

May God preserve the truth of faith as a bond and the proper view of good works in the Reformed Protestant Churches.

—Dan Birkett

## INSIGHTS

*Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.—1 John 2:20*

# THE WELL-TRAINED DOG AND HIS MASTER

## *The Analogy*

The following is a portion of a conversation that took place in the consistory room of a Protestant Reformed church in October 2021, several months after the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches. Present at the meeting were five elders, a minister, and me, at that time a member of the Protestant Reformed laity.

As a member of the Protestant Reformed laity, I had

sought help and counsel regarding the development of the controversy between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed Protestant Churches. I had turned where I thought that I should, to the spiritual leaders of the church. I wanted their wisdom from the word of God, their advice regarding the issues, and their answers to the charges leveled against them from the Reformed Protestant Churches.

My wife and I, newly married, had met with the whole

<sup>19</sup> *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2017*, 88.

<sup>20</sup> Herman Hanko, review of *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*, by Michael Horton, ed., *Standard Bearer* 78, no. 19 (August 1, 2002): 430.

consistory once already in September 2021. We were left with many concerns and questions; and on top of that, things were rapidly developing in both denominations. I sought another meeting with the elders and minister to further discuss these things. Since the last meeting, Professor Cammenga had preached his now infamous sermon “Shall We Continue in Sin?,” Professor Huizinga had given his conscience-soothing lecture “Whom the LORD Loveth, He Chasteneth,” and the *Standard Bearer* was continuing to publish Christ-displacing articles. My hope was to bring our concerns regarding these lies to our consistory so that they would recognize them, repudiate them, and lead our congregation into the truths of God’s sovereignty and Christ’s perfect work on the cross and the condemnation of man and his works for fellowship and blessing.

My wife and I were not, at this time, intent on leaving the denomination. We still clung to our place in the Protestant Reformed Churches, our friends there, our work there, and our life there. We desired our consistory to wake up out of a deep stupor and to show a holy zeal for the glory of God and to attack the lie in the midst of our churches.

The meeting with the consistory left us very disappointed. Not only did the elders and minister refuse to attack and condemn the lies in their midst; but they defended them, gave excuses for them, and, I believe, even developed them.

During the meeting the discussion with the elders and minister turned to good works and how they are brought about in the life of a child of God. After some talk about the extent in which God is involved in the good works of his people, an elder said, “That’s what the RPs believe. It’s like they think God needs to be there every step of the way [in doing good works].”

I answered, “That’s the truth, though. God does need to be there every step of the way. We cannot do anything without him.”

Then the same Protestant Reformed elder responded, “So I have been trying to explain the controversy to my kids in a way that is easy for them to understand. An analogy I came up with to help them to understand the issue is to imagine [that] a man gets a new dog and trains it. He starts out showing the dog where to walk, what to do. And then after training the dog, the master can throw a stick and look away, and the dog gets it and comes right back to the master. The master doesn’t need to help the dog every step of the way and show him every little thing to do. When a dog is well trained, it just does it without the master being there for every little thing. And that gives more glory to the master, because he’s a good trainer.”

After several seconds of silence, the Protestant Reformed minister said, “Uh, another analogy would be the vine and the fruit.”

Years later, I still think about this interaction. I have often wondered how this analogy could have been left unchallenged in that consistory meeting. I wonder that both for myself and the other men present. I could see a look of discomfort on the face of the minister as I glanced over, waiting for something to be said in response to that analogy. Perhaps the minister was pondering if this analogy was the result of his own preaching and teaching that one cannot call a regenerated child of God totally depraved; and if one does, one is heading toward antinomianism.

But nothing was said. With me, four elders, and a minister present, there should have been eruptions of holy horror against such an abasement of God’s work in the lives of his children. But there were not—not from the elders, not from the minister, and not from me.

While all the men in that room failed to condemn that false theology, God’s faithful and abiding word condemns it for us. I pray that those who believe this about God’s work or are silent regarding this error take heed to God’s word and turn from this deadly error and disparagement of God, his grace, and his Son, Jesus Christ.

This error came from somewhere, but I am not sure where, other than from the mind and wisdom of man that run mad to find anything wherewith to claim credit for man’s working and doing. All I know is that for my remaining time in that Protestant Reformed church, that error was never addressed, spoken against, or condemned by any of the elders or the minister. I must conclude that either those men believe this error, or they fail to see the deadly seriousness of this analogy, and therefore they tolerate it. The following words are for all to see how sharply this idea is condemned by scripture and the Reformed confessions and that the glory of God’s truth is revealed, leaving none with excuse.

### *Dumb Sheep, Not Well-Trained Dogs*

Jesus said in John 15:4–5,

4. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.
5. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

“For without me,” Jesus declared, “ye can do nothing.” Were the branch removed from the life-giving vine for a moment, the branch would wither and die. Were the Spirit of Christ removed from God’s child for a second, the child would become incapable of bringing forth a single good work and become spiritually dead. Sin and Satan would immediately once again rule in his heart and direct all that child’s thoughts, desires, wills, and actions toward opposition to God.

The power of our entire lives of good works is Christ alone. He dwells in his children by his Spirit, constantly breathing life into them and constantly sustaining them in that life. A moment apart from that Spirit, or even a moment not completely sustained in the Christian life by the Spirit, would mean utter and complete spiritual death. Of course, it is impossible for God to remove his Spirit from his child or to stop sustaining him in the Spirit, but this is to illustrate how utterly dependent God's people are upon the Spirit for their entire Christian walks in this world.

If God were to look away for a moment and leave his child to perform some good as a well-trained dog, speaking foolishly, God would look back and see not only that the dog failed to perform that which God had commanded, but he would also see that the dog immediately ran into extreme peril and killed itself.

This is why God in his wisdom designates a very specific animal to compare to his elect people: sheep, not well-trained dogs. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Sheep are dumb. They are clueless to the constant dangers that surround them. If they wander away from home, they are incapable of finding their way back. They need a shepherd constantly to oversee them, whose life is given over to watching the sheep, protecting them, defending them, and guiding them in the way they should go. No shepherd would tell you that it would be wise to attempt to train sheep where to feed, where to travel, and when to come home at night and then to leave the sheep alone, even for a moment, to have them do those things. And God is the most wise, almighty, good shepherd of his sheep who knows the frame of those sheep.

God does not train us and then let us go on our own to perform good works. Belgic Confession article 24 teaches very clearly that

we do good works, but not to merit by them, (for what can we merit?) nay, we are beholden to God for the good works we do, and not He to us, since it is *He that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.* (*Confessions and Church Order*, 54)

This article of the Confession puts not only the ability and potential for good works in God's hands but also the very doing of the works. God does not merely train us, empower us, or give us the ability to carry out his will; but the entire bringing forth, willing, and doing of good works are God's work in us through the Spirit. God does not begin the work, and then we finish it. God does not show us how to do the work, and then we do it. God does not cooperate with us to bring about the work. But the work is, from beginning to end, 100 percent the working of the

Spirit in us, sweetly bending our wills and causing us to do that which God in eternity ordained that we should do.

### *God's Providence*

The mere thought that God could glance away while we perform good works is a direct contradiction of Lord's Day 10, which teaches us the following:

Q. 27. What dost thou mean by the providence of God?

A. The almighty and everywhere present power of God, whereby, as it were by His hand, He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.

Q. 28. What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by His providence doth still uphold all things?

A. That we may be patient in adversity; thankful in prosperity; and that in all things which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 93–94)

All things, including our good works, come by God's fatherly hand. He delights to work in his children and in his creation. He is active in his children and creation and never, even for a second, leaves things unattended to glance away. Every good work and every step of the process of bringing that good work forth are the results of this working and activity of God. God receives all glory, honor, praise, and credit for those works. We receive none. Those good works did not come from us. We did not issue them forth. We did not accomplish them after being shown by God how to perform them. If it were any other way, then man would have reason to boast. And if man has reason to boast in some respect, that alone is enough to condemn a theological idea.

Ephesians 2:8–10 trumpets,

8. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
9. Not of works, lest any man should boast.
10. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

God saves us merely of his good pleasure, electing us in Jesus Christ and saving us through faith—a gift of God. The reason God does this is for the sake of his own



glory and that man may not glory in any part of salvation. God creates us as new creatures in Jesus Christ and brings forth every good work that he before ordained in his good pleasure to work in us. From beginning to end, salvation and its fruit are indeed of Jehovah.

This idea that God would look away from us or leave us unattended also takes away the comfort of God's children revealed in God's word that we constantly abide in and with him. God is constantly with us wherever we go—every step of our Christian walk—and he will never leave us nor forsake us for Christ's sake alone.

God forsook Christ on the cross for our sins that were put upon Christ; and because Christ suffered the horror of the complete absence of God's presence for us, God cannot and may not leave or forsake his people. They are righteous in God's sight with Christ's very righteousness and washed clean of all sin. For God to leave his people on their own, especially after saving them and bestowing upon them grace and his Spirit, would be to deny the work of Christ on the cross!

No, rather God says in Christ, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!" What a comfort that truth is to sinners. God never leaves us! God never looks away, even for a moment. God never leaves us on our own in this valley of tears, in this narrow way, in this sin-cursed world with dangers and threats on every side. He never says, "I have trained you; now go do what you have to do." God cannot and may not do that to his children, who are bought with Christ's precious blood. God loves his children and delights to dwell with them and fellowship with them constantly and forever.

This false idea of how God works with his children is essentially deistic. The deist imagines God somewhere in the sky, winding up the universe like a clock and watching it all unfold. The god of deism rarely, if ever, intervenes in his creation and is content to let things occur on their own. The god of deism is distant, uninvolved, and unloving. And a god who trains his children, only to let them go on their own to do this or that, is a distant, uninvolved, and unloving god. He is not God at all. God is present always with his people, and he constantly works through them and lives through them by his Spirit.

This false idea of how God works with his children is also essentially Arminian. This idea teaches that man, once regenerated, is able to do good on his own of his own will. The teaching is that once man is enlightened (trained) by God's grace, man can do good by virtue only of that empowered and enlightened will, perhaps cooperating with God's grace. So much is man's will empowered and enlightened that man does not need God there every step of the way to sustain man by his Spirit, but God merely gives man some grace, or some training, and man can do good without God. This is a mockery of God and

his grace, and it ultimately puts the power of man's life of good works in the power of man's will, as does the Arminian.

### *Purpose of the Law*

Another problem with the analogy of a well-trained dog is its very conception of how the law functions in the life of the child of God. I do not believe that this was the main point of the elder when he used this analogy, so I will be brief here. But I believe that there is an important point to be made here with the analogy's underlying use of the law. The analogy takes the law—the commands given to the dog as it is being trained—as the power unto the obedient life of that dog. The dog is shown and taught by the law what to do and how to obey; and, eventually, those commands get through to the dog, and the dog can obey the master. The dog can sit, roll over, fetch, bark, and be silent because of the commands repeated over and over by the master.

This, however, is not the function of the law in the life of the child of God. The law simply does not have the power to fuel the Christian life. The law was never given by God as a thing to repeat to God's children until they can obey it.

Canons of Dordt 3–4.5 teaches, in full agreement with God's word, that

though it [the law] discovers the greatness of sin, and more and more convinces man thereof, yet as it neither points out a remedy nor imparts strength to extricate him from misery, and thus, being weak through the flesh, leaves the transgressor under the curse, man cannot by this law obtain saving grace. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 167)

God's own purpose for the law is to more and more convince man of his sin and his *inability* to keep the law, not by repetition to train man to learn to keep the law. God's law can be brought to us over and over and over, demanding perfection, declaring the perfection of God, and laying before us the requirement to keep the law with the threat of damnation; and the law will never cause us to or make us obey it. That is shocking! That is totally opposed to our carnal understanding of how that law should function. But God's law was never written, delivered, and preached for that purpose.

Well, then, what is the power to our lives of good works?

Canons 3–4.12 states,

And this is the regeneration so highly celebrated in Scripture and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which

God works in us without our aid. But this is in no wise effected merely by the external preaching of the gospel, by moral suasion, or such a mode of operation that after God has performed His part it still remains in the power of man to be regenerated or not, to be converted or to continue unconverted. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168–69)

Canons 3–4.17 teaches that

the use of means, by which God of His infinite mercy and goodness hath chosen to exert His influence, so also the before mentioned supernatural operation of God by which we are regenerated in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the gospel, which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 170)

The power behind our lives of good works is not the law. The power is not moral suasion or coaxing obedience out of us. The power is not something begun by God and finished by us after he gives us the power to obey. No, the power behind our lives of good works is the gospel through the operation of the Spirit making us new creatures. Where the gospel is preached to God's children, one finds those who live lives of good works in thankfulness to the God of their salvation.

### *More Glory to God?*

Many will read this and insist that this analogy is not what the Protestant Reformed Churches teach and believe. They may chalk this up to a mistake, a slip of the tongue, or a moment of unclarity. But many will deny this came from Protestant Reformed preaching and writing.

Those who believe that they are not in danger of this theology or deny it exists in the Protestant Reformed Churches should reread the last part of the analogy. The line that is meant to connect the dots, the piece that completes the puzzle, the phrase that is meant to bend the teaching into orthodoxy is this: more glory is given to God when his child goes off on his own after being properly trained and performs good works.

And how often is that phrase not said to excuse the glorification of man's doings? Glory is given to God when God works this way. "I do good works! God does not do them; I do them!" they may say. "I really do them; it is *me*; I can do good!" they exclaim.

If you believe it gives glory to God to claim credit for your good works, then I want you to imagine yourself saying that before Christ on the day of judgment. You say that now before men—say it before God. Shout it before God. March right up to the throne where Christ sits and

say, "I really do good works. You did not do them; I did. I did good. You worked by your grace in me, but I did the work." One who claims credit and shouts for the world to hear, "I really do good works; it is not God doing them; I do them," will hear Christ say the words of Matthew 7:23: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

God hates self-righteousness. God hates man's boasting in himself and his works. God hates when worms and sinners take credit for the work that he accomplishes. That claiming credit for good works is unbelief speaking. That is the flesh speaking. The ones who will march up to Christ on the judgment day and proclaim before all that they did good works and were able to do good are unbelievers. They do not know God and his perfect standard, his other-worldly holiness, and they do not have a knowledge of themselves and their misery. Good works are Jehovah's work alone. Not first God, then man. Not God and man. Not God's training and man's doing. Jehovah's work alone.

God in his counsel chose an elect people who would praise his glorious grace. God foreordained and prepared every good work they would ever do. God sent Jesus Christ to the death of the cross to cover the sins of his people and to make them righteous, thereby giving to them the right to do good works. God through Christ sends forth his Spirit into the hearts of his children to regenerate them and to create in them faith. God sends all the life and righteousness of Jesus Christ into the hearts of his children. God gives to those children a work he has prepared and determined to work in them. God causes them to will the work by his Spirit out of the gift of that new, regenerated heart. God causes them to do the work by his Spirit's constant operation. God gives the ability to do the work. God gives the energy required to carry out the work. God gives the breath and the beating of the heart to sustain his child's earthly life to do that work. By his fatherly hand, God causes the mind to work, the hands to move, and the feet to walk to bring to pass his eternal will in that child.

And what does God's child do? What does that child accomplish? He does do something in this process; he does accomplish something; that is sure. What that child does, what that child accomplishes, is to ruin that work.

That work is carried out by a sinful and corrupt flesh that defiles and pollutes that work. So much does the child of God disfigure that work that God must take it and sanctify it in the blood of Jesus Christ, so that God may be properly praised by it. Man adds nothing and contributes nothing to that work. He does the exact opposite. If he were to compare that work to God's perfect law, he would weep, seeing all the sin that polluted that work:

all the sinful motives, all the sinful motions, all the sinful thoughts while carrying out that work. He would cry to God, “Be merciful to me, a sinner. I have polluted and corrupted even those good works, which were eternally prepared, died for by Christ, given as a gift through faith, and worked and caused by the Spirit. I have made those works ugly by my flesh!”

God is not glorified when man takes credit for his good works and claims that he, not God, did them. God’s child who desires by the Holy Spirit to glorify God abases himself and makes the confession of Paul his own confession. “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all:

yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Children of God perform good works. Children of God labor. Yet, not they, but the grace of God that is with them. Glory be to God! God—who eternally prepares that work, establishes the right to do the good work, and brings forth that work by his almighty power—causes and moves his children to perform the work, forgives their polluting of that work in the blood of Christ, and sanctifies that work!

May these truths of God’s word go forth conquering and to conquer and fulfill God’s eternal will concerning those who hear the truth.

—Joel Langerak Jr.

## CONTRIBUTION

# THE BEATITUDES (4): THE HUNGRY AND THE THIRSTY

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:  
for they shall be filled.* —Matthew 5:6

## Introduction

One of the great themes in Jesus’ sermon on the mount is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is mentioned on numerous occasions and is the great overarching theme of chapters 5 through 7 of the gospel according to Matthew. Within that broader theme there are also several mentions of righteousness. When Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, he came preaching righteousness.

There is a real and essential relationship between righteousness and the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven, which is God’s gracious rule over his elect people in Jesus Christ, is established upon the foundation of righteousness. There is no kingdom of God apart from righteousness. And there is no place in the kingdom for the people of God except they also possess righteousness themselves. That is what stands behind Jesus’ insistence later in the chapter: “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes

and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20).

The Pharisees had a form of righteousness in their outward adherence to the law of Moses. It was a righteousness that they achieved by themselves on the basis of their works. However, understand that Jesus does not commend the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. On the contrary, Jesus makes entrance into the kingdom absolutely and utterly impossible through the works of the law. You can imagine the people in the crowd asking, “How then can any man enter into the kingdom?” In verse 20 Jesus introduces an entirely different righteousness, which cannot be earned or merited but which is received entirely by grace.

Again, I say that righteousness is of crucial significance in Jesus’ sermon on the mount. Therefore, in the first section of the beatitudes, we are faced with the fourth beatitude, in which Jesus declares the blessedness of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Having been placed in the middle of the beatitudes, the fourth beatitude stands at the very heart of the experience of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The citizens of the kingdom hunger and thirst after righteousness. They alone are blessed.

### *The Object of Such Hungering and Thirsting*

In Matthew 5:6 Jesus proclaims the blessedness of the man and woman who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The text speaks of righteousness. Righteousness is the object of the hungering and thirsting of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. In order to rightly understand what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness, we must understand what the text means by righteousness.

Whereas we often make distinctions when we speak of righteousness, Jesus does not make any such distinctions. Therefore, the righteousness of the text must be considered in the broadest possible sense. There is no righteousness that is not rooted in God himself. God is righteousness in himself. In that sense righteousness is that perfection in God according to which God, in all his thinking and willing and in all the works of his hands, is in perfect harmony with his own divine will and being. God himself is righteous and is the sole criterion of righteousness.

In that connection righteousness for man means that man is perfectly in harmony with the being of God and in every point is agreeable to the will of God. Most basically, righteousness for man means that a man is right with God. Righteousness for man is not even first that he obeys God's law. The law reveals God as a righteous God. The law testifies concerning who man ought to be as he stands before God. For a man to be righteous means that he loves the Lord his God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. That is what it means for a man to be righteous.

Furthermore, the righteousness of which the text speaks concerns how God views a person. Righteousness is not judged first by what men can see or what men declare to be true of a person. Rather, righteousness concerns what God says about a person, that he is in a right standing with God.

In the text righteousness is something to be desired and therefore is something that does not belong to man by nature. That is the reality of man by nature as he is fallen in Adam. In Adam man is not right with God. However, it was not always this way. In the beginning man possessed a righteousness. The righteousness of man in the beginning consisted in his being created in the image and likeness of God in true knowledge, righteousness,

and holiness. It was a righteousness according to which man agreed perfectly with the will of God and existed in perfect harmony with God. Adam perfectly loved the Lord his God. Man had fellowship with the living God and walked with God in the light. And yet, that righteousness is not the righteousness of which the text speaks. The righteousness that belonged to Adam was a created righteousness, innate in Adam as a real, righteous man; and that righteousness could also be lost. Indeed, it was lost. The righteousness that belonged to Adam in the beginning was entirely lost when Adam sinned. In Adam all mankind was plunged into unrighteousness and dreadful guilt.

Rather, the righteousness of the text is a heavenly righteousness. It is an eternal righteousness that can never be lost. It can never be taken away. That righteousness is an unassailable righteousness. It is a righteousness that must be bestowed upon a person. The righteousness of the text stands outside of man by nature. Man by nature has no claim to that righteousness. It is an alien righteousness. Therefore, it is a righteousness that is utterly foreign to man by nature.

The righteousness of the text is the righteousness of God. It is God's righteousness. It is the righteousness that God himself worked out in Jesus Christ. It is that righteousness that is the gift of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, so much so that man has absolutely nothing to do with that righteousness. The righteousness of which the text speaks is the righteousness that God conceived of in his eternal counsel, so that righteousness was ever before God as eternally perfect in Jesus Christ from before the foundation of the world, apart from any consideration of man. That righteousness was realized in Christ, as was evident from the cross, wherein Christ was made sin for his people in order that they might be made the righteousness of God in him. That righteousness is the righteousness that is bestowed graciously as a free gift upon the elect sinner through faith in Jesus Christ. It is that righteousness whereby the elect sinner is translated from a state of condemnation before God into a state of justification, whereby God declares the elect sinner to be in perfect harmony with the will of God, and upon the basis of which the sinner is made worthy of everlasting life. That is righteousness.

### *The Hungry and the Thirsty*

To that righteousness Jesus refers when he declares the blessedness of those who hunger and thirst after it. Blessed hungry. Blessed thirsty. How utterly strange Jesus must have seemed to those listening! Who would want anything to do with the sort of kingdom about which Jesus was preaching? And yet, in this fourth beatitude, Jesus

gives what is most essential to the citizen of the kingdom of heaven: righteousness. Apart from righteousness, none shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Apart from righteousness, life in the kingdom is absolutely inconceivable. Apart from righteousness, all men perish.

That righteousness is necessary is evident from the language that Jesus uses of hungering and thirsting. Just as physical meat and drink are the means or instruments whereby man's natural life is sustained, righteousness is the instrument whereby man's spiritual life is sustained, with which the spirit of a man is fed and nourished, and apart from which a man perishes everlastingly.

To understand the significance of Jesus' language, it would be of some benefit to us to understand what exactly the text means by those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The word "hunger" in the original Greek means *to crave ardently or to seek with an eager desire*. Standing behind the word "hunger" is the idea of intense poverty. The one who hungers is starving. The hungry person in the text is like a poor and beggarly person, utterly lacking even the most basic necessity of earthly bread. And when Jesus mentions those who thirst, he does not introduce an altogether different concept, but he develops the idea of poverty even further. Standing behind the word "thirst" is the idea of painful, even severe, deprivation.

Therefore, when taken as a whole, the idea of the passage is that of an ardent, intense desire after and seeking for that of which the soul is utterly impoverished and apart from which the soul perishes everlastingly. The citizens of the kingdom of heaven hunger and thirst after righteousness. That righteousness is the object of all their longings, of all their desires. Their hearts yearn, yea, even pant, after that righteousness. Thoughts of that righteousness constantly present themselves before the citizens' minds.

The citizens of the kingdom hunger and thirst after righteousness from the position of those who are deeply impressed by the reality of their utter lack of any righteousness. This ought not to be surprising, for the same ones who hunger and thirst after righteousness are also poor in spirit. The poor in spirit are those who have an acute awareness of their own miserable condition before God by nature. They confess before God the enormity of their debts, which they owe to God on account of their sin in Adam and their own actual transgressions. Before God they see themselves as nothing and as having nothing to commend themselves unto God. While all men have this debt with God, not all men perceive the reality of this debt. And so it is with man's need of righteousness.

While all men possess such a dire need of righteousness,

not all men perceive or acknowledge that need. Man gives evidence to that. Man gives evidence to that especially when man considers himself to be something and goes about to establish his own righteousness. Unbelief in man always refuses to acknowledge that man is unrighteous, and therefore man also refuses to acknowledge his need of righteousness. From the beginning man has denied his great need of righteousness. From wicked Cain, who slew his brother Abel because he saw that Abel's works were righteous and that his were wicked, man has always denied his need of righteousness. Man must always contribute something.

The very same unbelief can reveal itself in the church too. Unbelief in the church manifests itself particularly in any doctrine of works-righteousness. Unbelief in the church reveals itself in any doctrine that teaches that man's act of faith, act of repentance, or obedience to the law of God is the whole or part of his righteousness before God. Unbelief comes in the form of those who teach that besides the perfect obedience and atoning death of Christ, whereby he merited perfect righteousness for his elect, there is that which man must do to be saved. Christ is no longer the whole of your righteousness before God. You must still do something. All forms of works-righteousness are anathema to the citizens of the kingdom who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for the citizens of the kingdom are also meek. The meek consider Jehovah. They do not consider themselves as anything. The meek consider Jehovah, and they wait patiently upon him. Their rest is in Jehovah, so that whereas they have no goodness, no holiness, no righteousness in themselves, Jehovah God is their goodness, their holiness, and their righteousness.

Only the citizens of the kingdom truly hunger and thirst after righteousness. That is because the citizens of the kingdom have faith. Faith alone hungers and thirsts after righteousness. That is simply what faith does. Faith does not go about to establish its own righteousness. Neither is faith itself righteousness. Rather, faith ardently longs for and seeks after that righteousness which God worked out in Jesus Christ. Faith endures the loss of all things for righteousness' sake. That one will not endure loss is a sign that he or she is not a citizen of the kingdom of heaven and does not hunger and thirst after righteousness. When people easily leave the church where the truth is preached because they hate the antithesis, or they hate some other doctrine of the Christian faith, it is simply the evidence that they are not the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. For it is a light thing for them to leave the kingdom of heaven as that kingdom has its visible manifestation in the world in the local, instituted church. It is a light thing to be outside the kingdom of

God and Christ. However, faith will endure the loss of father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters for the sake of that righteousness. Faith seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33), for faith acknowledges that apart from that righteousness there is only cursing and everlasting destruction in hell. Such is the ardent desire of the hungry and thirsty that they must have righteousness.

### *The Explanation for Their Hungering and Thirsting*

Imagine hearing Jesus' words. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst? Who in all the world would ever willingly choose to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Man by nature does not hunger and thirst after righteousness. Man by nature will sooner go to hell than to acknowledge his need for righteousness. If man were faced with a hypothetical situation in which man could either perish everlastingly in hell or acknowledge his own unrighteousness, man would choose to perish. And the citizens of the kingdom possess that very same flesh by nature. That is why God must work in us this hungering and thirsting. And that is also why what we do can never be a condition upon which the blessing of God depends. All things in the kingdom, including the lives of its citizens, are of God, through God, and to God.

The hungering and thirsting of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven are rooted in God's eternal counsel. There in the eternal counsel of God, God decreed that Jesus Christ should be the head of his kingdom and appointed to Christ the citizens of that kingdom whom God loved from before the foundation of the world. The hungry and thirsty were eternally before the mind of God. God's counsel is not a mere blueprint. But the counsel of God is the living reality of all things, and all things in time and history are manifestations and the unfolding of that eternal counsel. Such is the effect of the counsel of God that the citizens' hungering and thirsting are themselves blessings, which never did nor ever will depend upon anything in themselves.

For a man or woman to hunger and thirst after righteousness is a gift of grace from the king of the kingdom. God by his gracious rule enters the heart of the elect sinner by his word and Spirit and translates the sinner from out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. God lays hold of the sinner's heart, breaking down all the sinner's pride and works-righteousness; and God works faith in the sinner's heart, so that the sinner ardently desires and longs for that righteousness of God which is in Jesus Christ.

The work of God whereby he causes his people to hunger and thirst after righteousness is a continual

operation of the Spirit of God in their hearts. This must be the case because if left to themselves the people of God would desire everything else other than righteousness, for that new heart in which God works faith is surrounded on every side by the ruts of the old man of sin, who only ever desires unrighteousness and all that is displeasing to God. For this end, that the citizens of the kingdom should hunger and thirst after righteousness, God has ordained means. God works by his Spirit chiefly in the preaching of the gospel, and also through the use of the sacraments as visible signs and seals of that gospel, to increase and strengthen the faith of his elect, so that they more and more come to condemn themselves and their own unrighteousness and seek after that righteousness which is revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:17).

### *The Blessedness of the Hungry and the Thirsty*

Jesus declares the blessedness of those who do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed from eternity. Blessed in Jesus Christ. Blessed unto the glory and honor of the name of God. To be blessed of God means the supreme happiness of man. In the first instance, it is a blessing that the citizens of the kingdom even hunger and thirst at all. Such a wonderful gift of grace it is to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Outside of that ardent desire for, that eager seeking after, that desperate longing for righteousness, all the pursuits of this life are vain and empty. What a miserable waste of life it is to be so consumed with the things of this world, which can never satisfy, and all the while to be blind to one's greatest need, which is righteousness.

However, our Lord Jesus goes even further. Jesus declares the blessedness of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness: "for they shall be filled," that is, filled with that same righteousness. And we may not misunderstand Jesus' words here. It has been the labor of this series on the beatitudes to not understand them as so many do today, who make the blessing of God into some future reality that has yet to be known or experienced by the people of God. All too often that way of arguing lends itself to conditional theology. People do that all the time by making the reality of the blessing of God something that is realized and experienced in time *in the way of* man's doing something. Some are even so bold as to speak of "a sequence of time and experience" in which God works with his people, so that there is a sort of mutual interdependence upon one another in time. They interpret the whole of sacred scripture from that lens, which is the lens of man's experience, and

thereby arrive at their theology. However, we may not interpret scripture in that way. Neither may we interpret the fourth beatitude in that way.

Rather, when Jesus says that those who hunger and thirst shall be filled, he is first establishing the absolute certainty of their being filled. There is a real relationship between hungering and thirsting after righteousness and being filled. That is significant. It is so significant that the only one who is filled is the one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness. However, that relationship is not a conditional relationship, so that in the way of hungering and thirsting, only then can a man or woman be filled. Such is the blessedness of the ones who hunger and thirst after righteousness that as certainly as they hunger and thirst after righteousness and feel that earnest desire within themselves, they are also filled, finding true satisfaction and all their needs supplied in that righteousness.

How is it that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are filled? The answer goes a long way in explaining the blessedness of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The hungry and the thirsty are satisfied through faith. Faith, which is our union with Jesus Christ, so that we receive all the benefits of Christ, including the righteousness that he merited all his life long and especially upon the tree of the cross when he bore all our sins and the wrath due unto us for them. Faith, which is the mouth of the soul. Faith, which is the instrument of our justification. The hungry and the thirsty shall be filled; that is, they shall receive that righteousness utterly passively. Faith, which hungers and thirsts after righteousness, receives from the very hand of God that righteousness that God himself worked out in Jesus Christ apart from any of man's works.

Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are filled with that righteousness by faith alone. How utterly peculiar is that hungering and thirsting! The natural man who hungers and thirsts after earthly bread and water does not always have the assurance that he shall be filled.

It is possible that a man should hunger and thirst after physical meat and drink and perish, not having his needs met. However, it is utterly impossible that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall not be filled. The same faith whereby that righteousness is received from the hand of God is itself an assured confidence of that blessed reality.

There is no room for uncertainty in the text. They shall be filled. They are filled now, so that by faith, in their own consciences and experiences, they hear the blessed verdict of God, "You are righteous. I find no fault in you. All your sins are freely forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ." The citizens of the kingdom hear that verdict from week to week in the preaching of the gospel, whereby God comes in judgment unto all who hear, either for salvation or damnation. In the preaching of the gospel and in the sacraments, which testify concerning that gospel, God comes and fills the hungry and thirsty by faith, imputing unto them the righteousness of Jesus Christ. God blesses the hungry and thirsty daily with his grace, so that their lives in this world are a continual hungering and thirsting and being filled. God never leaves them without righteousness, for apart from that righteousness, they would have no life in them and would certainly perish.

And the citizens of the kingdom can never lose that righteousness. They not only are certainly filled now, but they also shall be filled unto everlasting life. That is the promise of the text to those who hunger and thirst now. "Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled" (Luke 6:21). The citizens of the kingdom look with earnest expectations toward the kingdom that is to come in the new heavens and earth, wherein righteousness and peace shall dwell and the tabernacle of God shall be with men. Then the citizens of the kingdom shall have to strive no more with the weaknesses and infirmities of their flesh. Then shall they live in the perfect enjoyment of the righteousness that is theirs in Jesus Christ, world without end.

—Garrett Varner



Reformed Believers Publishing  
325 84th St SW, Suite 102  
Byron Center, MI 49315

## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

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

*Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.—Romans 12:12*

**W**e can understand the apostle's words this way: in your hope rejoice; in your tribulation be patient; in your prayers be constant. Rejoice in hope because in this world you will have tribulation. In that tribulation be constant in your prayers for patience with a view to that hope.

The apostle speaks to the church of the elect and called saints: those who are born from above, children of the living God, and citizens of an eternal kingdom, living now in this world full of the seed of the serpent. You shall have tribulation. Surely those who take the name Christian can avoid tribulation. They carefully craft their words so as to avoid offending the world. By their associations and silence, they deny that they are much different from the world. And, indeed, they are not. But God's children, Christ's church, standing in the world as of the party of the living God, shall have tribulation. The world hates them. It hates them as it hated their Lord and as it hates their God. So the apostle writes in verse 14, "Bless them which persecute you!" Yes, God's children are the objects of persecution for their confessions, which are rebukes of the unbelief and ungodliness of the world. And at the hands of the world, they lose their names and honor, their families and acquaintances, their jobs and homes, their liberty, and their lives.

Patience in your tribulations! The wicked serve their purposes, both that the wicked fill up their cup of iniquity and that we be exercised in suffering and through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (v. 19).

Think on your hope! How grand a hope we have laid up for us in heaven: a glory that eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, and it never has entered into the heart of man to conceive, but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. It is perfection in body and soul and spirit to serve the living God. It is to walk forever in the undying light of the Son of God. It is to come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to the innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven; to God the judge of all; to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. It is such a glory that will be revealed in us that the afflictions of this present time are not worthy to be compared.

Rejoice in your hope! Possessing already now the earnest of our eternal inheritance in the Spirit and the promise of good things to come, rejoice in hope.

In your prayers, then, be constant! Yes, be ever living before the face of God our Father and living in the consciousness of his power and grace to give us what he has promised. Pray for patience to endure, with a view to that hope and with rejoicing in that hope, such tribulations as come on us in this life.

—NJL