



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

MARCH 2024 | VOLUME 4 | NUMBER 11

CONTENTS

- 3** **MEDITATION**
THE NEARNESS OF THE END
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 7** **FROM THE EDITOR**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 8** **EDITORIAL**
CHRIST ON TRIAL
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 22** A LETTER TO
THE CONSISTORY OF ZION
REFORMED PROTESTANT CHURCH
Nick Meelker
- 23** **OUR DOCTRINE**
WHAT HAPPENED AT ZION?
Rev. Luke Bomers
- 27** **RUNNING FOOTMEN**
FAITH AND PROMISE
Ryan Schipper
- 30** **INSIGHTS**
VAIN JANGLING
James Jansma
- 34** **CONTRIBUTION**
LABOR! LABOR! LABOR!
Jeremy Langerak
- 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 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
Email: 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 NEARNESS OF THE END

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. — 1 Peter 4:7

The Christian may and does properly reflect on what has transpired in his life in the past. There was joy and sorrow and laughter and deep pain. There were successes and painful setbacks. There were struggles and toil and times when things seemed to fly along as effortlessly as a bird soars in the heavens. There were births and deaths and marriages and the breaking of a marriage bond by death. To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven. There is a time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant, a time to pluck up, a time to kill and to heal, a time to break down and to build up, a time to weep and to laugh, a time to mourn and to dance with gladness and joy. There is a time for love, hate, war, and peace and a time to speak and to be silent. Have we not experienced all this as time marches onward and forward, as time flies past, and we are carried with it?

When we look back and see all the scenes and situations and circumstances through which time has brought us, we also invariably see much sin, weakness, and unfaithfulness. We may have many regrets in our lives, so much so that there may be pictures that we have a hard time looking at because they bring up and call to mind all our failures and sins.

We have passed all our days here in much sin.

So when we look back, we must, we cannot look back without calling to mind God's perfect faithfulness to us: his great love toward us; the greatness of his forgiveness; the overflowing of his goodness to us. Whether in sickness or health, in riches or poverty, in sadness or gladness, God has always been with us for good. And calling to mind his goodness and grace, we can also look forward. Though we can and we may and we should look back, the text calls us to look forward also, to look upward, to look away from this world, and to look in hope for one who is to come. We look toward the end of this age, the end of all ages, and the coming of the new age that shall be ushered in with the coming of Jesus Christ.

Behold, the end of all things is at hand.

Joyful announcement!

To that end we are called to look forward.

The nearness of that end we must contemplate.

By the "end of all things," the apostle means the end of this present age and all that is a part of it. When the verse

says "all things," scripture speaks of all things without any limit. Exhaustively—in heaven, on earth, and under the earth—there will be an end of all those things, and there will be a passing away of the form of the earth and heaven as they are currently constituted and as we know them.

We can understand that there is an end of all things as they were originally created by God in the six days of the creation week because we have two great examples of the disappearance of the form of things as God created them.

The first example is the fall of Adam and Eve. God made everything perfect in the beginning, and there was no death. There came an end of that form of the creation. Those things as they were originally created fell under the power of sin, the curse, and death. By the rebellion of Satan and his angels, there were great upheavals in heaven, and Satan and his angels were cast out. Through Satan's instigation man believed the lie of Satan, and man and all things of the earthly creation came under the power of death. All things as they were created fell under the curse, and that curse turned all things to destruction. So the perfect creation passed away never to return in that form, and the present creation groans now for a higher form.

The form of the world as it was cursed in Adam lasted until the flood. In the preceding chapter and in another place, Peter speaks of the flood. The world that then was perished, being overflowed with water, so that its very form passed away. It passed away never to return, and another form arose from its destruction: this world that now is being reserved unto fire for the judgment that is to come.

That world as it has existed since Adam, as it underwent the fall and groans under the curse, that world as it passed through the flood and is now reserved unto fire, that world will end. It is an end like those others, so that the present form of the world will perish. Yet that end will be so thorough and complete that a new creation must be made. A new form will be given to the world, a form that will be its everlasting form.

Thus the apostle means the end of time as we know it.

There are so many ends that remind us of the coming end of time as we know it. There is the end of the day, the end of the week, the end of a month, the end of a year. Time moves forward like a rushing stream, and time can never return to the place it once passed. There is an end of your

life and of the time that you have in this creation. That all points to the ultimate end of time as we know it. Not time as such will end, for time too must be lifted up and glorified to bear the weight and glory of the eternal creation.

But time as we know it—as it has regulated and has been the condition of creaturely existence since the beginning in Genesis—will end. In the beginning God made the heaven and earth. Then time began. That time runs and regulates all things, holding all things in its power. To everything there is a time and a season. That time—as it is composed of seconds, minutes, hours, weeks, months, and years, and as those years pile up into centuries, and the centuries add up to millennia and the millennia into epochs and ages—carries all with it. For some six thousand years, time has had this function. Every moment governed by God to accomplish its purpose.

But the end of all things is when this present age passes into the everlasting age.

Then everything that exists in time as we know them will end too: the universe as we know it; the sun, moon, and stars as we know them; the mountains and valleys; the rivers and oceans; the trees, flowers, and grasses; the beasts and birds. Every creature will end.

And man! Man in his earthly existence—with all his earthly thoughts and plans, his earthly inventions and works, and all that he ever produced, thought, and composed—will end. There will be a moment when man's entire earthly existence shall be swept away, shaken, destroyed, and burned with unquenchable fire.

The end is a conclusion, a drawing to a close. Like the year draws to a close, so all history and all that is in it will draw to a close. In that end, like the death throes of some gigantic beast, the creation will roll, shake, and tumble violently and wildly, seemingly uncontrolled and with terrifying upheavals.

Angels shall blow their trumpets over the nations, and nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be wars and rumors of wars.

When all of these things happen, the end is not yet.

The gospel will sound forth to the ends of the earth until all of God's elect have been called to repentance and have been gathered safely within the sheepfold of the great Shepherd. Like choking smoke after the fire of the gospel, false prophets shall come and say, "Here is Christ, and there is Christ." Do not believe them! But the love of many shall wax cold because of iniquity, which shall abound, and lawlessness as the world rushes in the development of sin to its final manifestation in the man of sin.

Then shall come that wicked one, the son of perdition, to whom the great red dragon will give his seat and his power and his authority. Like a great beast the antichrist will arise out of the turbulent sea of nations, and all the world shall wonder at him and his kingdom and his great

power and shall worship him, except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. And with that son of perdition will come trouble for the church such as she has never seen; he shall wear out the saints, and a great tribulation shall descend upon the church.

Then the vials of God's wrath will be poured out on that wicked king of Babylon, who swallowed up Zion, to break up his kingdom and his power and his authority with terrible plagues. The earth, which is the seat of his power, will cast him out, and the nations shall be gathered to Armageddon.

Then the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven as this form of the creation is shaken and falls to pieces and the very fabric of the universe begins to unravel.

Upon this scene of desolation shall be the last and the greatest of all the signs, the sign of the Son of man in heaven—Jesus in all of his magnificent power—when the truth of the Son of man, as the one in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, shall be revealed; and every eye shall see him, even those who pierced him; and he shall declare himself to be the awesome and irreprehensible judge of the quick and the dead.

At that end the goal has come! An *end* is a goal. "End" is the word that the Holy Ghost uses, but the *goal* of all things is at hand. With the coming of all those things will come the goal that God established eternally in his counsel.

Seemingly, the coming of the end is with uncontrolled violence, but it is not uncontrolled. Rather, the end is closely, minutely, and precisely controlled as that end had been determined by God before the foundation of the world. He declares the end from the beginning! God shakes the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, in order that that which cannot be shaken endure and that which he eternally purposed as the final form of the creation might be revealed.

The creation as God made it, the creation of Adam and Noah and Abraham and ours too is the scaffolding necessary for the construction of God's eternal house. He erected that scaffolding in the beginning. That form of the creation is not the purpose and goal, but the form serves the purpose and goal.

That this creation and its form is the goal is a carnal doctrine. It is the carnal doctrine of the worldly-minded man whose god is his belly and who minds earthly things. It is the doctrine of those who seek a kingdom of God on earth and seek to build a good and godly culture in the world in cooperation with that world.

But Peter says that all things will end. The world—all things as we know them, as they have existed, and as they presently exist—is not the goal. The world and all things shall end. They shall be shaken and fall to pieces and be dissolved in order that the eternal home and house that God

has built, the new Jerusalem, may be revealed in that day.

The goal is God's eternal covenant. God—God in Christ, God in Christ in fellowship with his elect people in a new heaven and a new earth—is the goal. This is the reason that all things exist. This is the reason that all things were created in the beginning. It is for that purpose that all things were by the sin of Adam subjected to vanity and to destruction. This is the reason that all things continue as they have. And when that goal is reached, then the scaffolding will be taken down. This is the reason all things must also end. This world must pass away in order that the eternal be revealed.

The building that God has made must stand in all its glory and beauty to the praise of his name and the name of his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the goal from eternity. This is the goal of all history. This is the goal of all things. This is the goal of Eden the first. This is the goal of Adam, although he did not know it at first. All things must exist and continue to exist; they must groan and travail at present; they must labor and strive, strain, suffer, fade away, and pass away until that moment when God's house is finished. Then the end has come. Christ shall be revealed in his glory, and all the elements shall melt with fervent heat.

The earthly clock, like the clock in some gigantic nuclear explosion, shall stop. And the clock of eternity will begin, never to end. To the coming of that end and according to his eternal counsel, God directs all things.

Behold, the end!

The night is far spent. The day is at hand!

This is not immediately apparent. Faith believes this according to the word of God. This is not a conclusion that man can arrive at by investigating the world. When man investigates the world, he says in his wicked unbelief that the world has lasted for billions of years, that in all likelihood the world will last for billions more, and that all things continue as they have from the beginning.

Man—if he has his heart set on an earthly kingdom of Christ at the end of the ages when Christians will be supreme and hold the powers of government and of society—says that the end is not at hand. He calls an end that is at hand pessimism. He looks around at the world and sees that the world is anything but Christianized, and he calls the church to be busy Christianizing the world. He sees that there is much work to be done, and so for him the end is surely not at hand. Indeed, the end about which Peter speaks is not the end for which he hopes, but he hopes for the coming of his earthly Christian kingdom. Thus he places the end of all things far, far, far in the future.

But the end is at hand when this world will be no more and when the eternal has come, says Peter. This is the revelation of the word of God to you and to me as much as the truth of the end is a revelation of God. God will have us know that the grand and glorious culmination of all things is at hand. Faith believes this.

What does the nearness of the end mean? Even if we reject the unbelieving doctrine of the evolutionist, yet we can say that the world has lasted for nearly two thousand years since the birth of Christ and the time of the apostle. Some say that the apostle was mistaken and only thought that the end was near. It may have been that the apostle Peter, who was only a man, when he wrote these inspired words indeed did think that the end would come much quicker than it has. But that does not mean that that is what the word of God means and what the Spirit intended when he moved Peter to write these things as inspired and infallible scripture.

The apostles like the prophets before them were inspired to write the word of God, and the apostles like the prophets did not understand fully the meaning of the word of God that was in them and of what they wrote and all of the implications of their words and prophecies. The church has had to search and to interpret the scriptures by the guidance of the Spirit to come to an understanding of these things.

The Spirit cannot mean that the end can come at any moment, as is the doctrine of so many. They suppose that the end can happen at any moment because Jesus can come at any moment to rapture his church off the earth. They teach that without warning and thus without signs, the end will come. Carnal doctrine! Its hope too is in an earthly kingdom and that the church will escape the tribulation of the end.

But the Lord himself spoke of signs of his coming. The apostle John revealed in great detail the signs that precede the coming of the Lord, as did Daniel and many of the prophets. The end of all things cannot happen at any moment. The end will not happen tonight or tomorrow or for that matter in a week or a month. Even though things might develop quickly, it is very possible that the end will not arrive for years.

Certainly, we reject the interpretation of those whose hope is in the earthly kingdom and a golden age of Christian dominance in the world in the future and who say that Peter was talking about the end of Jerusalem and of the Jewish economy and that all these things were fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans came against Jerusalem. Thus they tell us that Peter was speaking of an event that was very near! In that case the text has nothing to say to us and is irrelevant for the church. The church receives no instruction from this text, and the church need not know that the end is at hand because the end that Peter foretold has already in a sense happened.

That the end of all things is at hand means that this end is the next great event on God's calendar.

That was not true when God made the world. The world and the church in the world had to pass through many stages. The calendar turned after a brief stay in Eden. Adam and Eve stepped out of Eden, and the world continued for

a time. Then the calendar turned at the flood after only seventeen hundred years. And quickly man came to the tower of Babel. The calendar turned as God smote the beast with a deadly wound by confusing the tongues and scattering the nations. The calendar turned again with Abraham, again when Jacob went down into Egypt, again as Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness, again when Joshua took the Israelites into the promised land, again with David, and again with Solomon and the coming of the temple. Throughout the history of the Old Testament, the calendar of the world was turning and always aiming for the appearance of the Lord. Always with uplifted heads and outstretched necks, the church looked for his coming.

Suddenly, the Lord appeared in his temple, and the last hour had come. He was meek and lowly and came as the suffering servant of Jehovah. He was crucified, dead, buried, and descended into hell. He arose and ascended into heaven far above all things. Now there is only one page yet to turn.

There is only one great, grand, and glorious event that must happen. There will not be another turn of the earthly calendar of God's plan until the calendar turns and the kingdom of heaven is revealed in its glory when Jesus Christ stands on the clouds of heaven, declares himself judge of the quick and the dead, and accomplishes the resurrection and regeneration of all things.

That the end is at hand means that now the end is in sight and rushes on. It means that everything has that end in itself. With a kind of single-minded determination, all things are bent toward that end; like a huge river that is forced between the narrow walls of a great gorge piles up, tumbles, and rushes, so all history now is rushing toward the end. Or, like a great tsunami sighted on the horizon, the wall of water builds and builds until it finally crashes into land and swallows up all things in the eternal.

The end is here and approaches quickly. Behold, Jesus Christ is ready to judge the quick and the dead. Behold, he comes quickly. He fills his days and nights packing in all that must be packed in order to come to his beloved bride and to give her the eternal habitation that he has prepared for her from before the foundation of the world.

The calendar of history will turn once more and never turn again.

Behold, it is the last hour!

How sad—devastating, in fact—is that announcement for the man whose heart is fixed on things here below and whose horizons extend no farther than this earth. His plans are all here on the earth, and his satisfaction and fulfillment are found in the earth.

He lives on the scaffolding that God erected in order to build his house. When God tears down that scaffolding, he tears that man down along with everything that man stands for, all that he lived for, and all that he hoped for.

That man is insane the text says. The Greek word

translated as “be sober” means *sane*. Because the end is at hand, we are to be sane. But then the man who lives for the world is insane. He is like a man who takes up a load of bricks on the scaffolding that surrounds some beautiful, multi-roomed mansion being built. He takes his load of bricks off the pile, and he starts to build himself a house on the scaffolding. He never gets himself a room; he never peeks in the windows to see what is going on inside the mansion or asks any questions of the builders who are busy inside and outside building the mansion. He never takes a brick and puts it on the wall of the mansion, but he makes his own house separate from the mansion. You see him climb up. He starts to build a life on that scaffolding. He works hard too. He goes up and down. He takes his groceries up there. And he gets married on that scaffolding. His life might even be impressive and full of good things. And there are those who are working in and around the mansion, and he laughs at and jokes about them and calls them crazy. He is busy on the scaffolding, and all he does takes place on the scaffolding. And to add to the folly of the man is the very clear evidence that the man of the mansion is preparing to tear down his scaffolding. He announces that it is the last hour and that the building is almost finished. But the man keeps building his life on that temporary scaffolding. Insane!

Either that, or he is drunk. This is the other condemnation in the text of that man. The word “watch” means *not drunk*. The man who climbs the scaffolding of Father's house of many mansions and builds his life on that scaffolding and never peeks in the windows to see what is going on must be drunk. He is drunk on this world. Do not think that the text has in view only the drunkard, the drug addict, or the worldly man who adopts as his creed the hedonistic philosophy of the world, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” The text is talking to all men and condemns as insanity every work of man, effort of man, and plan of man that is apart from Christ, his kingdom, and eternity. The man who builds his life and lives his life for this world is also drunk.

He does not pray either. The drunkard cannot pray. He does not pray, but he cannot pray. That is always true of the drunkard. That is why that man is a spiritual vacuum. A man who is intoxicated with this world does not pray either. He may mouth some words, but the words are something like, “Come, Lord Jesus, but not yet!”

And what a sad announcement for that man is this announcement: “But the end of all things is at hand!” God is preparing to tear down the scaffolding and with it that man, all his life, and everything that he holds dear, and to bring him and all his life into judgment in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

And how often are we not like that man. The Lord must tell us that the end is at hand to awaken us to that reality.

Therefore, “be ye sober, and watch unto prayer.” That phrase is a single entity. We should understand it as exhorting us to prayer. The attitude that is required in light of the end of all things is one of prayer. “The end is at hand,” the Holy Ghost says. “Pray!”

Prayer is heavenly. It is the entrance of the child of God into the presence of God by the Spirit.

Fundamentally, then, the whole life of the child of God as a pilgrim and a stranger here below is a life of prayer. That the end of all things is at hand is a joyful announcement for the pilgrim and the stranger because he lives in a tent here and his home is almost ready to be revealed. It is prayer for the forgiveness of sins. It is prayer that is made about earthly things that casts the burden of those things on the Lord and is not anxious for them because they will all be added unto him. It is prayer for the glory of the name of God and the name of his Son: that he be revealed in all his glory in his judgments in the world, that

his kingdom come, and that his will be done in my life and in all the world. It is prayer that expresses the desire of the soul for the coming of perfection, deliverance from the body of this death, and for the coming of the Lord.

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

How can you and I pray that prayer in the attitude of longing for our heavenly home if we are insanely rushing up and down the scaffolding to build a home here, or if we are drunk on this present world and cling to the things here below? These things shall not remain. They do not abide.

Watch!

The world seduces the flesh and would make you drunk with its pleasures, its life, its goals, its satisfactions.

Watch because Satan as a roaring lion goes about seeking whom he may devour because he knows his time is short.

Watch. That you might be sober. And pray.

For the end of all things is at hand.

—NJL

FROM THE EDITOR

The past couple of editorials have commented on the decisions of recent meetings of Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). This editorial examines the recommendations passed by the classis that reconvened on February 8, 2024. The classis put Christ on trial and found him guilty and worthy of death. There was a total rejection of Christ. I emphasize that. There was also a total rejection of Christ over against the witness to Christ that was first found within the PRC herself and afterward, when she crucified Christ and he arose in the Reformed Protestant Churches, as that witness came from the Reformed Protestant pulpits, on the pages of this magazine, and in speeches. That witness also came through the testimony of the members of the Reformed Protestant Churches who have spoken loudly in their own personal lives to the truth of Christ.

That this rejection was over against that witness, I also firmly believe and emphasize. The PRC rejected Christ, having heard him clearly speak to her. I would go so far as to say that the recent classical decision would not have been possible without that witness. The Lord has used that witness to harden the PRC in her departure from the truth and specifically her denial of justification by faith alone. The PRC has exonerated her Norman Shepherd and by doing so has given approval to his theology, a theology that in short can be summarized as teaching that there is that which man must do to have the possession of his salvation. This theology must also be taken all the way to the judgment day.

There is that which man must do in that day too to possess his salvation.

The theology is a denial of the gospel and thus also a rejection of Christ. We have warned, and we will continue to warn with the hope that perhaps someone—someone—might hear and be drawn out. If it does not please the Lord so to do, we warn and continue to warn so long as God gives us a voice in order that the apostasy of the Protestant Reformed denomination be driven faster and faster by her rejection of that witness.

In the rest of the issue, there is Reverend Bomers’ beginning response to a vile letter that was sent out under the name of Christ by a faithless elder of the soon-to-be disbanded congregation of Zion Reformed Protestant Church. There are also the regular rubric *Running Footmen* filled by Ryan Schipper and two other excellent contributions. James Jansma writes “Vain Jangling.” Rome had her Tetzal, who peddled a worthless scrap of paper that forgave no one and saved nobody. The PRC has her Cammenga, who peddles a worthless grace and a damning gospel. Jeremy Langerak writes “Labor! Labor! Labor!” Labor is do not labor. Wonderful paradox! Labor is to cease from your evil works and to rest in Christ’s work alone! Labor is do not labor but believe! The paradox is solved in Christ, who performed all the labor for our salvation. The hardest thing for a man to do is to rest in Christ. Labor for it!

May the Lord use this issue for your edification and the tearing down of the kingdom of darkness.

—NJL

CHRIST ON TRIAL

The Old Drunk

The old man's face is beet red, and his eyes are bloodshot and watering profusely as he sits on the edge of his bed. He is hunched over and wheezing. The poison has eaten away his strength. He has an almost continual slur to his speech, so that he is difficult to understand. He shuffles to the kitchen. His hands are shaking now as he pours himself another gin. He used to enjoy the good stuff. Now a cheap ten-dollar bottle of swill is fine with him. He does not bother with the tonic and limes anymore. It takes too long, and the gin is what he wants anyway. He has not had a drink since last night, and his mind and body are craving some liquor. He finishes his drink in one big quaff. Ah! Relief! All is well now! Contentedly, he sinks into his chair while the alcohol floods his system, numbing his mind and destroying his body already decrepit from years of overuse. He has, of course, convinced himself that he functions much better with booze in his system. His family likes him better this way. He performs better at his job. Life is easier to take. He cannot possibly be without booze. He awoke this morning with a groggy mind and with strange injuries from his staggering about. Last night's activities are a blank in his foggy mind. Having polished off the first glass in a single gulp, he quickly pours himself another nip to get the day off on the right foot. And now juiced up on alcohol, he speaks grandiose things, his tongue and mind loosened by the elixir. Illusions of grandeur flood into his mind. He is ready for the day now.

The old drunk!

Such also have the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) become: an old drunk! He is drunken on the doctrine and wisdom of man. The PRC cannot be without them. He cannot imagine life without them. He has convinced himself and spends his time convincing others of the lie that he functions much better with the alcohol of man's doctrine and wisdom coursing through his system. He would be a careless Christian without them. He too used to enjoy the good stuff: the old preachers of man were smooth, convincing, and enjoyable. Now he contents himself with some badly made moonshine distilled by a few backwoods, theological hicks. The stuff gives him an awful headache in the morning, but it gets rid of the shaking of his daily withdrawals. Every now and then

his stomach rebels and vomits in protest. But he must have a drink.

If someone accuses him of being a drunk, he becomes very offended. He is a perfectly sober person. He has convinced himself that he alone is able to balance man and Christ as the way of salvation. He can drink some man and still honor Christ! If someone threatens to take away his booze, he becomes equally enraged, lashes out, and flails about trying to hit the offender, slurring, "Anthinomianths!" A few weeks ago he slipped and almost drowned in his own vomit that an ailing stomach hurled out in protest; thankfully he was able to get up somehow.

His hand is shaking now as he pours himself another glass. Just a sip: *but the gospel does require an obethient response from man.* Just another sip: *we must accurately dithtinguith between the right to life and the possethion of life.* He is glugging now and no longer sipping: *a man musth do thomething to obtain the pothesethion of salvation; good workths are not to be thslichted in assuring the soul of its jussificathion...*glug, glug...*these thstatements while thsuggesting errrrooor and... laacking clarificathion...and though these thstathments asth commonly underthstood are error...falsth doc...errorths...* He is struggling now, the alcohol slurring his speech badly and taking away all sound judgment...*butth asth we ethplain them, they do not conthra...conthradict thscripthure... or the confethissons, or conthradict the dethithissions of synod twenty-eighteen...*glug, glug. He made it. He prides himself on his clarity of expression and that no one suspects that had a few nips before he took the bench as judge. He sinks into his chair exhausted by the effort.

He will perish, will the old drunken PRC, with his booze of man. What has come upon him, the prophet Habakkuk prophesied long ago,

15. Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!
16. Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD's right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory. (Hab. 2:15–16)

Long ago Protestant Reformed ministers started giving their congregations the inebriating drink of man. And the ministers made the people drunk on it and exposed them to folly and derision. And the Lord is making those men drink too and is exposing them to folly and derision. The whole piece of advice considered by Classis East on February 8, 2024, was nothing but the shameful rambling of a man who had overindulged on the hard liquor of the doctrine that man must do something to be saved. Some of the protests to classis were the protesting vomit of a drunk's stomach that the night before had had enough of the rot-gut gin of man. The other protests were holding out to the drunk a glass of badly made theological scotch as an alternative to the bad gin that has caused so many hangovers.

Derail by Declaring Illegal

At the recent meeting of the Protestant Reformed Classis East, the classis treated a number of protests against its decision to exonerate Rev. K. Koole of false doctrine taken at a previous classis. I treated that decision earlier.¹ That decision was, of course, a hash; and it appears that nearly everyone recognized this, and the classis overturned its decision. The previous decision was written under the leadership of Prof. R. Dykstra, and the pre-advice to classis had his slimy, political, and unethical fingerprints all over it. When protestants came to the January 10, 2024, meeting of classis pointing out the shameful nature of the decision—foolishly thinking that they were dealing with honest men—Dykstra tried to derail the whole movement to treat these protests by suggesting that they should be declared illegal. According to the transcript, he said,

Mr. Chairman, as I hinted earlier, I have some difficulty with simply saying that they have satisfied article 31, particularly the protests that have to do with classis' not dealing with the three statements and that we need to get into those three statements and decide them. Again, the Church Order, article 31, says that if anyone complain that *he has been wronged* by the decision of a minor assembly, then *he* has the right to appeal. Not one of the protestants indicated a reason why they thought they were fulfilling article 31, how they were wronged. This is a matter, to my mind, between a consistory and the minister and Grandville's consistory requiring an apology. Reverend Koole wrote it. Grandville approved of his apology. So this is a matter between consistory and minister. If Reverend Koole thought *he was wronged*, then *he* had every opportunity to protest and appeal. He did not. It is his case. He

is perfectly capable of protest and appeal. No one needs to step in for Reverend Koole. Should the churches allow others simply to stand, to start protesting and appealing someone else's matter? That's my concern.

With the previous appeal of Mr. VanDer Schaaf, he brought to our attention that a consistory had condemned the minister for false doctrine without demonstrating it from scripture and the confessions and that the minister then was guilty of serious sin without being condemned by the confessions. But now we have something different. Now we have three statements of Witsius, statements that Classis East left alone. Again, Grandville demanded an apology. Reverend Koole apologized. He repudiated those three statements. That to my mind should finish it. What possible damage to the churches would there be from simply leaving those statements alone? I see *no benefit whatsoever* to our discussing those things. Someone might not like them. Someone might say they can be rightly interpreted. But if those statements stand as they are repudiated by Reverend Koole, I do not see any way how that's going to affect our churches. Let not classis argue over statements of theology by a man who was not Protestant Reformed, never was, been dead for three hundred years, and statements that Reverend Koole himself has repudiated. This, this, just seems like something *not worth our work of classis*. Classis doesn't need to do this.

But article 31 is where the rub, seems to me, comes. Are the men bringing this really wronged? Are *they* wronged? I realize our churches for a long time have been very lenient on this. I can appreciate that. I don't want wrong pipelines. But I do think we need to send the message to the churches that just because you don't like something, does not give you the right to protest it. You realize that technically if we go this direction, a man can comb the bulletins of the churches and say, "I don't like the decision that the consistory of such and such made," and so protest it. That is what this leaves us open to. Anybody who doesn't like a decision may go ahead and protest it. I believe it has to be tighter than that; it has to be really that the man himself is wronged by the decision. So that is why I'm going to vote against that the protests are legally here...

This is a favorite tactic of the unethical men of Classis East when they do not want to deal with an issue: just declare it illegal! Perhaps the protestant will be discouraged

¹ Nathan J. Langerak, "Pete Won! Now What?" *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 7 (December 1, 2023): 7–15.

and drop the matter. Perhaps the screws can be put to him, and he will back down. Dykstra's argument is completely bogus, of course, as anyone with half a brain can see and understand. The advice he approved deliberately avoided the doctrinal matter laid before classis. The doctrinal matter could not be any more serious: Did Christ do all that is necessary to be saved, or is there that which man must do to be saved? The October 2023 classis sidestepped the doctrinal matter. That is an offense and a grievance to the whole denomination. That should not need to be stated. If there is a doctrinal controversy that comes to classis and the classis completely sidesteps the issue, then that is the offense and that is the grievance personally of every member because the classis left the matter undecided, and the matter of doctrine is the most important matter that a classis can treat. Deal with the doctrine!

The classis did not listen to Professor Dykstra. The reason was very simple: there was a doctrinal impasse between the consistory of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church and the protestant Pete VanDer Schaaf. The case was not either, as Dykstra deceptively framed the case, a finished matter between a minister and a consistory. This was a matter of Grandville's consistory having charged its minister with false doctrine for teaching those statements and of a protestant arguing that there was no false doctrine taught. Pete was also not arguing merely that a consistory cannot convict a minister of false doctrine without using scripture and the creeds. But Pete was arguing that Koole did not teach false doctrine. Period. The previous decision had tried to avoid the doctrinal issue like it was the plague.

Several protestants demurred.

Heretical Statement One

The issue at the classis was Koole's promotion, use, and explanation of three statements from Herman Witsius, the dead theologian that Koole had promoted as orthodox in a series of *Standard Bearer* articles three years ago. The first statement, as taken from the committee of pre-advice's document, is as follows.

1. Rev. Koole quoted and explained the following statement from Witsius in the December 15, 2020 issue of *The Standard Bearer*: "Scripture teaches that something must be done that we may be saved." (Agenda, pg. 45) Rev. Koole also referred to the following statement of Witsius in his explanation: "Scripture teacheth that a man must do something, that he may obtain the possession of the salvation purchased by Christ." (Agenda, pg. 47).

The committee advised,

1. That Classis make the judgment that: a) statement #1 *by itself* can suggest error, and b) Rev. Koole's *explanation and use* of statement #1, although lacking certain clarifications, does not contradict Scripture, the Confessions, or the decisions of Synod 2018.

The classis took a decision that the statement could be explained in an orthodox fashion that does not contradict scripture and the confessions. Classis said that one can, in fact, and Reverend Koole did, explain that scripture and the confessions teach that man must do something that he may be saved and that scripture and the confessions teach that a man must do something that he may obtain the possession of the salvation purchased by Christ. Classis hid that statement behind all kinds of qualifications and caveats, but the basic decision is this: with the right clarifications you can explain that egregious phrase rightly in an orthodox sense that does not contradict scripture and the confessions. Classis did not, in fact, prove that. Where do scripture and the confessions hint in the least sense that a man must do something to obtain the possession of his salvation? The committee tried to talk the statement straight by simply imposing a meaning on it. But Witsius did not mean what classis said. He meant a man's doing something to obtain the possession of his salvation. Be honest with the man. He believed in the distinction between *the right to* salvation and *the possession of* salvation, and he taught that many holy exercises of faith and obedience are necessary before one has the possession of salvation.

What is supposed to save this phrase in part is that Witsius rejected conditions. The committee said, "[Koole] demonstrated that Witsius rejected conditions in the first article of the series." Reverend McGeown argued,

I am going to quote from the first *SB* article, November 15, 2020. It says, "Witsius rejects the notion that Reformed theologians can speak of some condition a man must perform to receive salvation, while at the same time holding to the doctrine of election, that is, claiming to maintain that Christ purchased salvation for the elect in the *absolute* sense of the word. It is either/or. Either Christ purchased salvation for the elect absolutely and fully, or He did not." So Reverend Koole teaches that you may not say that man fulfills a condition or that he...works or something else to receive salvation. He says that in the very first article. That is the context in which these articles were written.

But that one has to defend his phrase from the charge of conditionality means that in all likelihood the phrase is conditional. And that Witsius rejected the word *condition*

is no more proof that he was not conditional than the PRC's saying that she does not teach conditions is proof that her theology is not conditional.

The committee told us that Reverend Koole was not guilty of false doctrine because he explained the phrase rightly. What was his explanation? That a man must do something to obtain the possession of salvation means that "when the Word is preached, there must be a response to the call of the gospel in a positive, submissive, obedient way." So responding to the gospel in a positive way is what man then does to obtain the possession of salvation? Still heretical!

So Koole continued,

Witsius...is neither referring to doing something to give Christ the right to save...nor to gaining a right to salvation. The key word is "possession." Witsius is referring to the personal experience of one's own salvation and one's own enjoyment of it.²

So then what we have is that man must have a positive response to the gospel to obtain the possession of his salvation, and this possession of salvation is his experience of salvation. He must do something to experience his salvation. Nope! Still heretical!

Every Reformed man knows that the experience of salvation is the effect of the Spirit's application of salvation. The experience of salvation is not the result of man's working, whether that is his doing faith for salvation or his doing works for salvation. The experience of salvation is not by works either.

I am not sure what more glorious experience can be imagined than knowing Christ. It is at the very heart of the Christian experience. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, my only comfort is knowing that I belong to Christ! That is some experience! And the apostle says in Philippians 3:8, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." I note that the apostle includes in that his good works, when he says, "Not having mine own righteousness" (v. 9).

So Koole continued,

It is evident that Witsius is using the phrase "the way to life" in two different manners. In the first instance, Christ is the way to life in the sense of being the one only ground for approaching God and His work the sole basis for the right of access.

But for Witsius, using the phrase, "the way to life" in connection with that central truth does not rule out using the phrase also in connection with Christian piety. As for the second usage of the phrase, it is clear that what Witsius has in mind is what we now refer to as "in the way of." As he states, "...because thereby we go to the possession [!] of the right obtained by Christ."³

So now what we have is Christ is a way to life as the sole basis of access to the Father. And Christian piety is a way to life in the sense of obtaining the possession of salvation, which would be access to the Father. Is not life with God eternal life, as Christ said that to know God and Jesus Christ, his Son, is eternal life? So now we have two ways to God: Christ and Christian piety. And it is even worse, for we learn from Koole that all that Christ did is get us the right to access God, but works are the actual way to God. And this he says is what the PRC means by "in the way of."

What classis did do is to give an interpretation of what classis now means by an obedient, willing, active response to the gospel. It is man's doing something to obtain the possession of his salvation. The decision of this classis tells us that all the talk in the PRC about order, necessary way, obedient responses, and *in the way of* means that there *is* something man must do to obtain salvation from God. Obedient responses are the way to obtain the possession of salvation. This sounds a lot like what David Overway taught when he said that Jesus Christ and man's Spirit-wrought works are the way to the Father. In fact, Koole's doctrine is not one whit different.

What classis left out was the ABCs for every Reformed person as expressed in Lord's Day 6:

Q. 17. Why must He in one person be also very God?

A. That He might, by the power of His Godhead, sustain in His human nature the burden of God's wrath; and might obtain for, and restore to us, righteousness and life. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 88)

Jesus Christ obtains! Having obtained, Jesus Christ restores to us—as our possession and in our own experiences—both righteousness and life. And when you deny that by teaching that there is that which man must do to obtain the experience of his salvation, then you assault Christ's Godhead and say that he is not God.

2 Kenneth Koole, "Herman Witsius: Still Relevant (4)," *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 7 (January 1, 2021): 150. To show how Reverend Koole interpreted and explained Witsius' statements, the committee of pre-advice quoted this in its recommendation under 1.b.3 and noted "Agenda, pg. 47."

3 Koole, "Herman Witsius: Still Relevant (4)," 150. Continuing to show how Koole explained Witsius' statements, the committee of pre-advice quoted this in its recommendation under 1.b.4 and referenced "Agenda, pg. 48."

Bernie Kamps, a member of Grandville's consistory, said on the floor of classis,

We are not in any way whatsoever concerned with Reverend Koole's orthodoxy right now, since we made that announcement after his apology that he is Reformed. We believe he's Reformed and orthodox...Reverend Koole wrote that these statements were improper, and he came to see that these weren't clear; he doesn't want it off the pulpit; he stated this himself many times. Yet we go round and round here.

Oh, of course, Reverend Koole does not want Witsius' statement preached! Just like De Wolf said that he could give up the word *condition*. But Koole in his own deceptive words is preaching and teaching the substance of what Witsius taught in plain words. And Grandville and the whole Protestant Reformed denomination should see that Koole's explanation is every bit as bad as Witsius' statement. Koole said that he does not want Witsius preached, but Koole never militated in his preaching and teaching against Witsius, and more importantly Koole never repudiated his own explanations of Witsius.

One delegate was nervous. Reverend Kortus spoke:

Mr. Chairman, I am not in favor of this advice. And part of it is that section on page 8, #2 with the parentheses, and then a through e. What I'm hearing is, uh, all of us can agree with all of those statements. But what I'm wondering, is that really *all* that was being said? When I go back to taking Koole's own definitions and plugging them into that statement that we're discussing, and it works out to this: the believer must do good works *that* he may obtain possession of salvation. *Or* a believer must do good works *that* he may enjoy/experience salvation. If we approve this, we are saying that that statement, those two statements, do not contradict scripture, the confessions, or the decisions of Synod 2018. Are we so bold as to put that on paper? I find it noteworthy that that's *not* on paper. That in a through e, there's no positive statement that it's not contrary to scripture to teach that the believer must do good works that he may obtain the possession of salvation or that he may enjoy and experience salvation. I think we're softening what was communicated in the articles, what was taught in the articles, to try to say we're okay with this. I think what was taught is stronger than what's set forth in a through e. And maybe that's a question we need to face: Are we, would we put those statements on paper and say we approve of this?

The answer to his question is, yes, they were so bold. You have to dig and take out all the verbal mumbo-jumbo, but in the PRC you may preach and you must preach as sound orthodoxy that there is that which man must do to obtain the possession of salvation, only you can say that by saying that there is that which man must do to experience and enjoy his salvation. It is the same thing. Different words. Same false doctrine.

Heretical Statement Two

Regarding statement two, the committee said,

1. Rev. Koole quoted and explained the following statement from Witsius in the December 15, 2020 issue of *The Standard Bearer*:
 - a. "We must accurately distinguish between a right to life and the possession of life. The former must be assigned to the obedience of Christ, that all the values of our holiness may be entirely excluded. But certainly, our works, or rather these, which the Spirit of Christ worketh in us, and by us, contribute something to the latter." (Agenda, pg. 45)
 - b. Rev. Koole also made the following statement, giving voice to what he sees as an antinomian perspective, which Grandville takes as his commentary on the Witsius quote: "...surely it would be unlawful (improper and unbiblical) to urge upon the believer the life of godliness (of good works) because in some sense this life of good works serves one's own salvation."

The committee advised,

1. That classis make the judgment that: a) statement #2 *by itself as commonly understood* is erroneous, and b) Rev. Koole's *explanation and use of* statement #2, although difficult to reconcile with the common understanding, does not promote the erroneous sense of the words, and does not contradict Scripture, the Confessions, and the decisions of Synod 2018.

Now, that is some linguistic gymnastics! Later in the advice, the committee also tried to talk straight Reverend Koole's explanation of Witsius:

Men drift in the direction of antinomianism exactly because they fail to distinguish between what grants the *right* to life, over against what God has ordained shall contribute to the *possession* (the personal enjoyment and benefits of that

new life, and may properly be promoted as such in the preaching.

Yep! That is heretical too!

Now understand that the classis left in place and did not address the matter of the distinction between the right to life and the possession of life and Koole's use of that distinction by saying that what man does contributes to his possession of his salvation. The Reformed have always made a distinction between the accomplishment and the application of salvation. But when they taught the distinction, then they always made it clear that both are by grace alone. Grace is the power of the accomplishment of our salvation at the cross. Grace is the power of the application to the elect sinner of that salvation finished and perfect at the cross. The application of salvation to the elect sinner is the work of the Holy Spirit—a wonder of grace—through faith alone and not by works at all! The application of salvation to the elect sinner is the specific reference in Ephesians 2:8–10:

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.

Salvation—salvation as the sinner's possession of it and his enjoyment of its benefits—is by grace alone and not by works. Salvation is by grace alone and not by the toxic and vile combination of grace and works that Koole promotes. It is not true that the sinner's works contribute to his possession and enjoyment of his salvation. It is not true according to the specific language of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 2:8–10. It is not true according to the Reformed creeds either. Lord's Day 20 of the Heidelberg Catechism says,

Q. 53. What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

A. First, that He is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that He is also given me, to make me, by a true faith partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me forever. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 103)

Giving the possession of salvation is the specific work of the Holy Spirit. According to that confession, then, the Protestant Reformed classis by not condemning Koole and rather exonerating him of false doctrine insulted the Holy Spirit and robbed him of his work and gave it to man's works. The classis maintains that there is such a distinction as Witsius and Koole make and in the way that

they use the distinction. Note well that their distinction is not between the accomplishment of salvation by Christ and the application of that salvation by the Holy Spirit. But their distinction is between the right to salvation purchased by Christ and the possession of that salvation by man's active faith and his works of obedience. We have the right to salvation by Christ, and we have the possession of salvation by works! That is the theology of the PRC by this decision, if words have any meaning at all. And still more, as with the previous decision, a man can preach these things that Witsius taught and that Koole explained and never be condemned. The minister can be asked to explain. But he cannot be condemned for false doctrine.

Heretical Statement Three

Regarding statement three, the committee report reads:

1. Rev. Koole quoted and explained the following statement from Witsius in January 1, 2021 issue of *The Standard Bearer*: “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.” (Agenda, pg. 50).

The committee noted Koole's explanation:

By that last phrase, where Witsius speaks of sanctification as “assuring the soul as to its justification,” he 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.

That is heretical too! And we have yet another distinction that the PRC makes up to save the doctrine of man and to salvage man's honor and man's reputation. Take out all of Koole's distraction words, and he says that good works assure souls of justification because good works are evidence that one is justified. That is not an explanation but a deceptive restatement of Witsius' clear statement. Sanctification for Koole means good works.

Sanctification is not, in fact, good works. Good works are the fruits of sanctification. Sanctification is God's work by faith alone to cleanse the sinner from sin and to make him a saint. God does that without works. God does that by faith alone through the operation of the Holy Spirit and by the preaching of the gospel as the means of grace.

But for Koole sanctification means works. He throws in a few *Spirits* and a *Christ* or two and sprinkles on the word *gift* like a little salt. But the bare statement is that good works assure souls of justification because good works are evidence of justification. So the soul is looking

not at Christ for assurance of justification but looking at works. Koole tries to defend his doctrine by claiming that saying good works assure of justification is not making them the basis of justification. But that is not an escape. Assurance must rest on a sound and solid basis so that what assures of justification may rightly be said to be its basis. Faith is assurance of justification because faith lays hold on the foundation of justification, which is Christ alone and his perfect atonement and his everlasting righteousness. If faith looks at works too, then works must also function as a basis of justification, all of Koole's denials notwithstanding.

The committee recommended about statement three:

1. That Classis make the judgment that statement #3 and Rev. Koole's explanation and use of the statement, are not in conflict with Scripture, the Confessions, or the decisions of Synod 2018.

Here the classis attacked Christ outright. No dodges or weaves. They hit him right on the face and plucked the hair off his cheeks! Christ is not enough. Good works also function along with Christ for the assurance of justification. This is the death of Christian hope and assurance. The classical committee also showed that it is completely unethical in its treatment of the decision of Protestant Reformed Synod 2018. According to the committee report, Synod 2018 said,

True faith cannot look to its works to help find or maintain the assurance that is found in Christ alone...Good works have a proper place and function in the Christian life but they do not function as helps for finding and maintaining assurance of our justification.⁴

The classical committee said that good works are not to be slighted when we are assuring souls of justification. Stated positively, good works assure souls of their justification. In fact, when the minister is assuring his congregation of justification, he may not slight good works but must diligently direct the congregation to their good works for the assurance of their justification. The 2018 Protestant Reformed Synod said that good works do not assure souls of their justification. If words have meaning, that is the truth of the matter.

So how did the unethical men of the committee get around that? Listen!

Synod's statement does not rule out that good works are evidence which the believer may

observe to confirm that he is in the faith, and thus that he is justified by faith (practical syllogism).

Just sweep aside the contradiction. The committee wants good works to assure of justification. Synod 2018 said good works do not assure of justification. So the committee simply asserts an invented syllogism. The syllogism is apparently this: A man is justified by faith. Faith produces works. A man has works. Therefore, he is justified.

But that is a sorry syllogism and a worthless foundation for assurance. The fact is that one of the premises of the syllogism—that I am justified by faith—is not good enough. The correct statement is that I am justified by faith alone *without* or *apart from* or *before* good works. That is the statement of the gospel. The gospel is not that I am justified by faith. A Roman Catholic can sign that. The correct statement is that I am justified by faith without works, or I am justified by faith alone. That correct statement rules out and destroys the rest of classis' syllogism. If I am justified by faith alone without works, then works are also worthless for the assurance of justification. This is also scripture's teaching in Romans 5:1: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"! Peace with God is assurance. The believer has that being justified by faith alone without works. There is no syllogism necessary. It is not necessary because Christ is enough. He is enough, and I have Christ by faith, which is the assurance that everlasting righteousness and eternal life are mine for his sake.

Children of the Majority Report

These men of the committee and the classis showed that they are not the children of the valiant defenders of the truth in 1953. Listen to those men deal with heretical statements:

In our opinion both the statements which the protestants condemn are literally heretical regardless of what the Rev. DeWolf meant by them, regardless of how he explains them and regardless of however much we may rejoice that his examination shows that he does not believe the heresy implied in them.⁵

That is how real men endowed with the Spirit of truth deal with heresy. Reverend Koole took statements of Witsius and introduced them to the churches to talk those statements straight, and they are egregious. Koole was teaching the churches those things, and he intended the

⁴ *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches 2018*, 69.

⁵ Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 502.

churches to learn the Arminian dialect that there is that which man must do to be saved, that good works assure of justification, and that to obtain the possession—experience—of his salvation, there are many holy exercises of faith and obedience that man must perform. Not only were the statements bad, but Koole’s explanations of them were worse, if nothing else for their deceptiveness.

The committee members and the classis that followed them are the children of the writers and supporters of the majority report that was on the floor of Classis East in May 1953, which tried to talk De Wolf’s heretical theology straight. The recent classical committee tried to talk Reverend Koole’s statements straight, and the committee approved the false doctrine of justification by faith and works, Christ and works as the way to the Father, and man’s doing something to obtain the possession of his salvation. In this connection one of the protestants painted a picture for the classis. It was a good picture and a telling picture. Protestant Dan Van Uffelen:

Mr. Chairman, I think there’s been several references to Reverend De Wolf and 1953, and I think that’s an important comparison, not because I’m trying to compare the two theologically necessarily, but it’s how the churches handled erroneous statements or statements that were suspect. In 1951 and 1952, as has been pointed out earlier today, Reverend De Wolf had said, “God promises everyone of you that, if you believe, you shall be saved.” And “Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the kingdom of God.” Classis East of May 1953 responded this way to those two statements, and this is a quote: “The statements are literally heretical, regardless of what the Rev. Hubert De Wolf meant by them, regardless of how he explains them.” The mind of the men in ’53 was, “We’ve got bad statements here. We can’t let them stand. They need to be repudiated, regardless of what Rev. Hubert De Wolf meant by them, regardless of how he explains them.” Imagine the historical context. It matters, of course. The historical context was the Declaration of Principles. Those statements obviously went against the Declaration of Principles. And the historical context today matters too. The synod of 2018, which Grandville appeals to, that’s the context. And so I want you to imagine for a minute, that in 1953, what would have happened if classis said, “The statements by themselves, as commonly understood, can suggest error. And Reverend De Wolf’s explanations and uses lack clarifications and are difficult to reconcile with

common understandings, but these statements do not contradict scripture, the confessions, or synod.” If that had happened, the Declaration of Principles would have been rejected. The schism may have been avoided for a while. But the conditional covenant would have reigned in the PRC...If we look back to the way that our fathers handled this, it’s refreshing. It’s a decisive way to deal with doctrinal matters.

But the picture that Van Uffelen painted did actually happen in 1953 when the colleagues of Reverend De Wolf decided to talk his statements straight. And that is also precisely what happened at this Protestant Reformed classis. It has been going on in the PRC for some time, and the result is precisely what the speaker says: the doctrine of a conditional covenant, a conditional justification, and a conditional experience of salvation is regnant in the PRC.

One is tempted to mock as Elijah on Mount Carmel mocked the foolish and doped-up prophets of Baal. “Call a little louder! He might be on a vacation! Maybe the drivel that you dreamed up will work this time! Maybe God will deliver you from your predicament with the wisdom of man that you sucked out of your thumb on this occasion! Maybe your defense of men’s honor and your trampling on Christ’s honor will bring peace at last! The doctrinal statement dreamed up by some of your ministers did not work and was found to be false doctrine. The Protestant Reformed Synod 2018 did not work either, and its decision too was found to be devilishly clever. Grandville’s compromised decision and Koole’s false apology did not work. The wickedly political decision of the October 2023 classis did not work. Maybe with this go around, you will arrive at a way to deny Christ that everyone can accept!”

If it were not so serious, the report of the committee of pre-advice that was substantially adopted by the classis would be hilarious. One would not think that intelligent men could come up with such a concoction of lies and sophistry. Some of them have obviously learned to be politicians during their time in the PRC. The goal seems to be to say nothing and please everyone. Certainly, the idea seems to be not to come out and condemn someone. And honestly, I was waiting to see what this committee came up with. There was some glimmer of hope that perhaps, just perhaps, the men might say something worthwhile. But instead, as a drunk staggering around, pretending that he is sober, they made complete fools of themselves. The Lord put those men on the committee so that he can tear the mask of orthodoxy from them and show that they, like the rest of the PRC, have forsaken Christ.

A Drunk as Judge

What this drunken man that is the PRC did not do—with what iota of understanding was left in his intoxicated brain—was to put himself to bed. He decided instead that while drunk he was going to enter into the most serious task that a church can perform: judge doctrine! And this drunken judge took in hand this past February 8 to put Christ on trial. In Psalm 69:12 Christ himself prophesied of these men and the decisions that they took: “They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards.” Ah, yes, drunken judges in David’s time and in Christ’s time and in our time. There is nothing new under the sun.

And when the drunken Protestant Reformed classis put Christ on trial, the result was predictable: the classis crucified Christ afresh and put him to an open shame. That is because the drunk is a spiritual vacuum. God is apparently not done asking the PRC what she thinks of Christ and who she says Christ, the Son of man, is. She has, of course, previously made clear what she thinks of Christ and who she says the Son of man is. He is a buffoon; he is a schismatic; he is a destroyer of peace, a tearer down of churches, and a divider of families; he is an anti-nomian and a rebel against authority. He is but half a savior, and he and his work are not enough. These things the PRC has said about Christ through her decisions to remove faithful ministers; and she says them repeatedly in her sermons, writings, and in public family letters. As Christ came to the PRC, she despised him as a worthless thing, certainly worthless by himself to give fellowship with God apart from man’s works of obedience. And Christ was put on trial again by a classis that was completely blitzed on its own badly made moonshine of man.

Several men at classis claimed confusion about who was on trial. No one seemed to understand, or no one cared to understand, that Christ was on trial. The classis argued back and forth about whether Koole was on trial or Witsius was on trial or both were on trial.

Some argued that classis forget Witsius and just judge Koole. Professor Dykstra said,

Is the statement of Witsius the doctrinal impasse? Is that what we’re here to decide today, whether this statement of Witsius is Reformed or not? Is that what we’re going to decide here at classis? I think that’s the problem. And in my mind the classis has to focus on b), but we can’t because we have a) here...

That’s what classis has to be concerned about: not in the end how orthodox Witsius was, but whether Koole’s explanation is orthodox.

Later on Dykstra chimed in again,

So if we’re going to sit here and debate Witsius, to me it’s foolish. Our concern is Reverend Koole. Are his statements, are his statements, heretical? And give me the scriptural and confessional proof for that. That’s all that this classis needs to do.

It was not Reverend Koole on trial. He sat in the back watching and listening to the classis wrangle over his false doctrine, and he did not lift a finger to help or offer a word of explanation. Many of the delegates tripped over themselves and their own words to make sure to let everyone know that they, of all people, did not question Reverend Koole’s orthodoxy. “Of course, Reverend Koole is orthodox,” they chimed. How dare anyone question the orthodoxy of a Protestant Reformed minister. Surely, they were not so mean-spirited. Never mind that Koole preaches about available grace and that he preaches that the scarcely saved righteous must have a righteousness of works and obedience that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees or they cannot approach the table of the Lord. Never mind all that. Reverend Koole must be orthodox. He is a Protestant Reformed minister after all.

One delegate made plain that he was not advocating for a Formula of Subscription exam, but he noted that it would sure be nice to hear from Koole. Reverend Spronk:

What is in the heart? We can’t judge the heart directly, but based on the testimony of Reverend Koole, what is his doctrine? I don’t know how to get there. If we need to recommit and focus just on that, or if—I’m not making the statement to, uh, well, I guess I do wonder about just asking the man. I’m not saying, I don’t say that I want a Formula of Subscription exam, but in a certain sense my question is, how does the classis get at *that*? That’s the issue. We want to know the orthodoxy of Reverend Koole.

It would have been interesting, to say the least, to hear from the old fork-tongued serpent. He has been preaching sermons for years that are utterly Christless, fumbling around with his notes either to cover his total lack of preparation or to cover the rotten statements that he does make behind a smoke screen of stammered words and unfinished sentences. He should have been given a Formula of Subscription exam many years ago. He could have been given one at classis. At least some of the delegates acknowledged that there was suspicion surrounding him and his orthodoxy. One of the delegates said,

Even the statements from 1953 that we all agree are wrong—about our act of conversion, or God promises to every one of you—in the end were not the subject of the examination of Classis

East. Those statements can be debated and talked about in the *Standard Bearer* or the theological journal, but I think the same thing about the Witsius statements.

I point out that the 1.a.2) with its statement that Synod had something negative to say about certain statements—Synod did not get into a long discussion about those statements; Synod did not even say that ministers could never use those statements. For example, someone could say that obedience is necessary for fellowship in the covenant—that would not mean that the Protestant Reformed minister had said something that automatically means he is a heretic, false teacher. The right thing to do would be to ask him, “What do you mean by that?” And I think that there have been men in the past who used that statement—obedience is necessary for fellowship in the covenant—and then explained themselves in a very orthodox fashion, so that no one questioned whether that man was trying to teach the improper function of good works.

And so that’s the same thing that I’m seeing here. We are getting into a discussion about Witsius’ statements, that I think could be a good theological debate in the *Standard Bearer*, in the Protestant Reformed journal; but at the end of the day, if we’re not here to discuss the orthodoxy of Reverend Koole, then I don’t know what we’re doing here.

I’m glad that Grandville said that he was orthodox and that they didn’t want him to be under suspicion, but I think part of the issue is that there may be suspicion. Is classis in its decision getting to the heart of it, so that when our decision is done either we have said, “Yes, that suspicion is merited”; or we have said very clearly, “No, there is no suspicion,” and our judgment shows it’s orthodox, and there is no suspicion of Reverend Koole’s orthodoxy?...

In 1953 the whole matter had to do with De Wolf’s orthodoxy, and today this whole matter has to do with Reverend Koole’s orthodoxy. And we do have a duty to the brethren to dig into that and make a statement about that.

But Reverend Koole was not on trial.

Some delegates thought that Witsius should be on trial. So Reverend Mahtani said,

I don’t think it would be the right direction for classis to try to judge the orthodoxy of Reverend Koole. From the simple point of view, from the

simple proof that was already mentioned, that his orthodoxy has already been judged by Grandville. The difference between Reverend Koole and De Wolf is that Reverend Koole apologized, and so there is no question about his orthodoxy. And he apologized for it, and Grandville has received his apology. I think the right direction is to focus on the statements. The statements have already been declared by Grandville erroneous, and Reverend Koole has acknowledged it and apologized for it. And the history shows that now there’s a protest and an appeal to classis that those statements—not the orthodoxy of Reverend Koole—the statements should be viewed as orthodox or not and then declared erroneous.

Witsius has gone already to his long home. He wrote what he wrote, and if the church does not have the sense to see that what he wrote is bad, then that church does not have the guiding hand of the Spirit anymore either. What Herman Witsius wrote is bad. It is to be rejected as false theology.

Other delegates were very squeamish about putting the dead body of Witsius on trial. Perhaps it smacks of the Roman Catholics, who exhumed dead bodies to condemn the heretics posthumously and in absentia. Joshua Hoekstra said,

The difficulty in judging this case is that the main doctrinal impasse centered around three statements that were then explained by Koole... Some want to emphasize this interpretation or that interpretation. Some want to emphasize what Koole explained; some want to enter into debate of whether Witsius was orthodox or not. So this advice tries to wade through that, and I think a) is still important. When you think about what caused the confusion or the controversy that led to the seven protests that come here today, it has to do with how people first read, first understand a statement by Witsius. Now whether that’s appropriate or not of a reader, I’ll withhold on that. Witsius is a top-ten theologian listed in the *Standard Bearer* for sovereign and particular grace.

But Herman Witsius was not on trial.

So Pete VanDer Schaaf argued that the trial was only a matter of not persecuting ministers for using language from other eras that may need some explaining in an environment of suspicion and slander whipped up by men who gave themselves over to slander:

I am convinced that we have come to this position, this deliberation, because at one point

there was a Protestant Reformed minister who did give the wrong place to good works in, if my memory is correct, either fourteen or seventeen statements that synod specified. That appears to have given people, some people, the impression that because a minister gave the wrong place to works in specific sentences—statements—and contradicted other teaching, which was biblical, that it is now permissible to pull statements out of their context, to ignore clear definitions of words that are given, and to judge a minister on that basis. What happened after that made the situation worse. What happened after that was that a few men—I'm not talking about the many who were misled; I'm talking about the few who were the leaders—gave themselves over to the sins of slander and of schism and of the false doctrine of antinomianism, very effectively misled some of our sheep, and they've frightened many more to the point where speaking about the value and the benefits of the sanctified life has now become extremely difficult. That is my understanding of how we've gotten to this deliberation.

For the brothers who are sincerely concerned that my protest would introduce language that—I'm trying to remember what one of the speakers said...This protestant does not have the purpose of trying to move ministers to use language from a different age, which our people may need explaining in order to understand. The purpose of this protestant is to remove from the discipline of ministers the idea that language, or the language we're referencing, must be taken as heretical, or even may be considered the basis of discipline. I want to assure the brothers of that.

Ah, yes, the trial was a defense of some language. Pete does not want the language, to be sure. But this all is just the result of bad ministers who made it impossible to speak about the value of a holy life.

But the words of Witsius and Koole were not on trial. Christ was on trial.

And he was tried by those drunk on the doctrine of man. Listen to one delegate. Rev. Bill Langerak argued for what he believes is the truth of the gospel, apparently also the gospel that he preaches: "Good works are necessary to enjoy or experience fellowship with God. Period." You put the period in the wrong spot. This is, though, the Protestant Reformed statement about the gospel. First, it is Christless. It is completely false from that point of view. What is necessary to experience fellowship with God is Christ and Christ alone. But the necessity of good works to experience fellowship

with God is the Protestant Reformed gospel. It displaces Christ.

And, second, if we go back to the PRC's supposedly vaunted Synod 2018, her gospel puts Christ and man and his obedience on the same level. Rev. Bill Langerak, defending Synod 2018, said,

I believe that's part of the confusion, or maybe even the objection is in the statement of synod that fellowship with God, or the experience of it, is by faith *and*. The *and* there is not optional: "and in the way of obedience." That is not talking about justification there; otherwise, the *and* may not be added. When we are talking about the life in the covenant, the life of the covenant, fellowship with God, the *and* must be there. It is not negotiable. So if that is the confusion, we had better clear it up.

The *and* is not optional! It is demanded. The PRC teaches that we experience fellowship with God on the basis of what Christ did, through faith, and in the way of obedience. The PRC did not even phrase it this way: "We have fellowship with God and the blessings of salvation through faith and on the basis of what Christ has done. PERIOD. *And* good works are the fruits of thankfulness in our fellowship with Jesus Christ." No, no. The PRC is going to fight tooth and nail for that *AND*. Christ *AND* our obedience. It does not matter one whit that the PRC says, "*In the way of* our obedience." The meaning of the word *AND* is to coordinate two things. In the Protestant Reformed doctrine, the word *AND* coordinates Christ and man as the way one has fellowship with God. The PRC does not want Christ alone. She does not want a Christ that is enough. And that ends one finally with statements like Rev. Bill Langerak made, "Good works are necessary to enjoy or experience fellowship with God. Period."

In answer to the question of Pontius Pilate to the Jews, "What evil has he done?" the Jews shouted that Christ made himself the Son of God. With that answer they rejected a Christ who was enough. They rejected Christ's claim that he is the light of the world; they rejected his word that except a man eats Christ he has no life in him; and they rejected his word that they believed not because they were not of his sheep. They rejected Christ because in his demonstration that he is the Son of God, he took away all their works of obedience to the law as being worthless for salvation, blessing, and fellowship with God.

And in answer to that same question that was before the judges of the Protestant Reformed classis: "What evil has he done?" the committee of pre-advice and the

classis as a body said, “He took away our works!” That is the same rejection as the Jews gave when they said Christ made himself the Son of God. The Son of God does not need your works! The PRC cannot conceive of a Christ who does not need man’s works; she does not want a Christ who does not need man’s works; she cannot say every day about man’s works what the Reformed confessions put in the mouth of the believer over against the gospel of Christ, “I daily increase my debt!” The PRC cannot say with the publican, “Lord, be merciful to me the sinner!” She cannot say with the prophet, “All our righteousnesses are filthy rags!” And she cannot say with the apostle Paul, “I count all my works but loss and dung!”

All the PRC can talk about is works. Even the way that she talks about the controversy, a question of the place and function of works, is telling. The PRC makes the whole controversy about works. That controversy cannot be settled until one correctly answers the more basic question of the place and function of Jesus Christ. Get that straight first. If one gets that straight, then one will see that works are fruits and only fruits.

Sanctified by Faith Alone

In seeking to answer the question of the place of works, the PRC is fond of making a distinction between the place of works in justification and the place of works in sanctification. But that distinction is telling too.

For example, Rev. Bill Langerak made a few different statements on the floor about this:

Mr. Chairman, some things were said in between, but I do believe that what a previous speaker said is why there is some controversy and confusion because what was said is contrary to Synod 2018. There seems to be a continued application of justification with salvation, which is not orthodox. Synod 2018 said that obedience and good works are, are, the life of the covenant. And it interpreted “in the way of” very clearly in that way...The fact of the matter is that good works and obedience are the possession of salvation. They are gifts of salvation that are worked in us and given to us. They are the liberty, the actual freedom, the power from sin that is granted in justification...Justification grants me the right to freedom. Sanctification is that freedom. That is why we must object to good works and obedience *obtaining* that. That is one reason anyway. And we have to do justice to that.

There is a lot there, but a number of things come out. Good works are the life of the covenant. Good works are

gifts of salvation. Good works are the liberty of covenant life. And Reverend Langerak says that sanctification is also that liberty. Now, what I gather from this is that good works and sanctification are synonyms. They are both the liberty of covenant life. And as Reverend Langerak argued earlier, when we talk about how one experiences covenant fellowship, it must be Christ *and* the way of good works. The *and* is not negotiable. So also on this basis regarding sanctification—which he says is the life of the covenant—we must speak about Christ *and* the way of good works as how one experiences God’s fellowship, salvation, and blessings. What Reverend Langerak did was to make sanctification synonymous with good works. And others did that throughout the debate as well. The ploy is that they can say, “When we talk about justification, then works are excluded.” And remember that for them justification merely gives the right to liberty. Justification apparently has no function in the actual experience of covenant fellowship with God. And then they can go on to say, “*BUT* when we talk about sanctification—the life of the covenant—then we must talk about the way of good works.” Good works and sanctification are synonyms.

In justification the works of the sinner are absolutely excluded. You must confess that or you are not Protestant and you are not Reformed. The scriptural statement of the gospel is that God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5). The creedal statement of the gospel is Lord’s Day 23 that “though my conscience accuse me that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them...” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 106). Works are excluded.

To say that we are justified in the way of our obedience is to destroy the gospel. But the PRC is fine with our sanctification being in the way of our obedience.

But sanctification too excludes our works. We are sanctified by faith alone as much as we are justified by faith alone. I can prove that both from scripture and the creeds. First Corinthians 1:30 is used by Lord’s Day 6 as a statement of the gospel:

Q. 18. Who then is that Mediator, who is in one person both very God and a real righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, *who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.* (*Confessions and Church Order*, 89)

Jesus Christ is our sanctification. Our works are not our sanctification. They are its fruits. The Belgic Confession in article 24 says,

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the

operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 52–53)

The works of sanctification are fruits, and only fruits, of the word of God and the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification. There is no "in the way of works we are sanctified."

The PRC makes the distinction because she wants our works to be the way to God, the way to fellowship, and the way to blessedness in God's covenant. In short the PRC wants those works to get man something. But works are the fruits of God's salvation of us. Works are fruits of the covenant and all its glorious salvation and all the experience of that salvation that we have by faith only and for Christ's sake alone.

And we must be mindful that the PRC makes her decisions over against the clear testimony and witness to the gospel that has been given against her, specifically over the past couple of years. Pete VanDer Schaaf let it be known that in this controversy, even though there is an agreement to ignore the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) by the clergy of the PRC, nevertheless the PRC is hearing what the RPC is saying. And the PRC is rejecting it and by that rejection is being driven deeper and deeper into her error.

And, too, one must understand that the PRC must trumpet these classical decisions as further development of the truth. The PRC was busy trying to hide her trial of Christ. I understand that an announcement was made at the meeting of classis that no recordings or pictures of the pre-advice were allowed. Such an announcement, of course, is nonsense, since church meetings are public assemblies not private assemblies. Even the state recognizes that public meetings can be recorded. The ban also goes against the PRC's own history when Rev. H. Hoeksema would publish transcripts of entire exchanges from the public assemblies of the church. The PRC is busy trying to limit information. What are you so scared about, boys? Afraid to step on a land mine?

I have several pages of transcripts of the debate at classis, and the whole thing is shameful. In all the thousands of words, the name Christ comes up twenty-five times. Of those, the majority of the uses are in quotations from Witsius or a random *Christ* from this or that speaker! Most of the rest are from two ministers, Reverend Kortus and Reverend Mahtani; an elder, Tom DeVries; and Dan Van Uffelen, one of the protestants. The rest can talk only about works. Sanctification is our works. Fellowship in the way of works. Blessing by works. Assurance by works. Works, works, works!

No Valiant Men

There was not one valiant man who stood up and damned the whole damnable report. Not one. Even those who spoke against the advice did so as though they were scared to offend men, and they probably were. The whole classis was concerned about the honor of men. There was not one man who stood up and gave a defense of the truth that was clear and compelling. That means that there was not one man who stood up and defended Christ. Not one. The whole report was designed to save a man and to save men. Where is Christ in the whole report? What about his offended honor? That is because even the men who do not apparently like what Koole said do not believe that the church can exist without man and his works.

Listen to Rev. Dan Holstege regarding statement one, that there is that which a man must do to be saved:

That's where I'm at with the statement itself. I believe it is wrong to say, ever, "There is something that man must do to be saved." There is something that I must do to be saved. I'm referring now to good works. If we're talking about faith, then we can debate that differently because I could believe—yes, that's different. But with regard to works, that I must do good works to be saved, I don't know that that statement can ever be explained properly. It's erroneous. I'm almost willing to call it erroneous. I've been struggling with it, and I think, I've been kind of landing on it's extremely ambiguous and not distinctively Reformed, and I'm very pleased with that. But it's almost always erroneous.

Someone was quick to correct him:

Just pointing out that that's not the statement. The statement is not, "There is that which must be done to be saved"; it's "that we be saved." That's been a point of maybe debate or discussion, but there is a different word usage, so we have to be careful with that.

Yes, be very careful with men and very careless about Christ. The speaker's sickening precision was about a distinction without a difference! Reverend Holstege had a problem with saying that works are what a man must do to be saved. He could not quite bring himself to call that erroneous. If it is about works, maybe he could be convinced. But he did not have a problem with saying that faith is what man must do to be saved. Would not want someone to think that you taught that man must do nothing to be saved! He too cannot imagine a Christ

who does not need man's works, a Christ who says, "Do nothing to be saved!"

The men who do not apparently like what Koole said are drunk too. They view it as a threat to the church's holiness to say that we have salvation, fellowship, blessing, eternal life, and all of Christ's riches and gifts by faith alone. PERIOD. They are afraid to say that faith is not what man does to be saved. They believe that it will make careless Christians if you say that repentance is not what man must do first before God will forgive his sins. They and their professors trash the idea that we are justified in eternity and that we are saved in eternity and at the cross. They are afraid of the gospel, some of them. And some of them hate the gospel with the same hatred of the Pharisees for Christ. And you can tell because whenever Christ comes into their assemblies to be tried yet again, they condemn him every time. Drunk on man. That goes for the best of them.

I was wondering if there would be some new faces in church on Sunday after the decision, especially among those who said that they categorically denied that there is that which man must do to be saved and who said categorically that the only work that must be done for our salvation is Christ's work. But they apparently are not willing to leave all and lose all for Christ. There are jobs, schools, relationships, associations, and reputations to maintain, after all.

Everyone wants to focus on Koole's supposed explanations as though he was only explaining in our language what Witsius was teaching. But does not anyone reason backward, so that when Koole explains that when Witsius wrote that man must do something to obtain the possession of salvation and that when Koole explains that this is what the PRC means by "in the way of" that he is in fact creating an entirely new idea about what "in the way of" means? He is saying that "in the way of" means that there is that which man must do to obtain the possession of salvation. Also understand that it is now orthodox in the PRC to preach and teach these things.

Especially telling, and this was the prize for those ministers who are intent on destroying the PRC with their false doctrine, was Witsius' third statement: "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." And the classis said, "That Classis make the judgment that statement #3 and Rev. Koole's explanation and use of the statement, are not in conflict with Scripture, the Confessions, or the decisions of Synod 2018."

This is a total overthrow of whatever good there may have been in the 2018 synodical decision of the PRC. You have assurance by works. You have peace, hope, joy, assurance by works. Not merely that your works are

visible and evident fruits of faith, so that the believer says that he is in the faith. It is not what a believer does in his self-examination, but it is full-blown assurance by works. Romans 5:1 says that Christ is enough. Lord's Day 7 says that Christ is enough. The entirety of the Reformed creeds say that Christ is enough for salvation, joy, hope, blessing, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, and eternal life. Christ is enough! So the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 11 asks, "Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?" The word translated as "welfare" in the Lord's Day could be translated as *bliss*, *security*, or *assurance*. Do they believe in Jesus who seek their assurance in their works?

They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these things must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior, or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in Him necessary for salvation. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 95)

For the PRC, man must look at his works to find assurance that he is justified! And the Belgic Confession in article 22 says,

For it must needs follow, either that all things which are requisite to our salvation are not in Jesus Christ, or, if all things are in Him, that then those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation in Him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides Him, would be to gross a blasphemy; for hence it would follow that Christ was but half a Savior. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 49–50)

According to the advice of the classical committee, Jesus Christ is not enough to assure us of our justification, but we must look to our works for the assurance of our justification. And the PRC blasphemes Christ as but half a savior. Ministers must preach in the PRC, and the PRC must trumpet as her gospel, that assurance of justification comes by faith and by works. Now, assurance of justification is one's justification. No one may deny that. To know in my conscience and in my mind that my sins are forgiven is having those sins forgiven. And that comes by faith and by works in the PRC. It is justification by faith and works. And it is another gospel that is no gospel at all.

And the drunk stumbles on...

Will any sober up?

—NJL

A LETTER TO THE CONSISTORY OF ZION REFORMED PROTESTANT CHURCH

Below is a letter that was sent to the consistory of Zion Reformed Protestant Church (hereafter Zion) by Mr. Nick Meelker, a former elder of the church. In this letter he explains why it was necessary for him to withdraw membership from Zion and to desert his office. Why did Mr. Meelker leave? Mr. Meelker writes, “The issue is our view of polemics and antithetical preaching.” According to Mr. Meelker, the preaching at Zion was schismatic, hyper-antithetical, abusive to the flock, without comfort, and turned children into bloodthirsty savages. So intolerable was the preaching at Zion that Mr. Meelker departed only eight months after Zion’s pastor had been installed into office. So seriously harmful was the preaching at Zion that Mr. Meelker’s only recourse as an overseer in the church was to flee immediately. And I publish Mr. Meelker’s letter with the purpose of responding to it. I respond to this letter as the allegedly intolerable pastor at Zion.

I see no ethical issue in publishing this letter, for although the letter was addressed to the consistory, Mr. Meelker sent this same letter by email to the congregation of Zion on December 13, 2023. By Mr. Meelker’s own actions, he made this letter public. Certainly, he can have no valid objections to it being printed.

Dear consistory of Zion RPC,

It is with much sorrow that I write this letter to you. For many months our congregation has been divided, and we are growing more and more divided by the day. We could try to point at specific doctrines that the denomination holds to, which members of the congregation disagree with. We could point at the way we treat each other and how we walk together in the life of the body. We could look high and low for the problems each member has and attempt to diagnose the cause of our division. But in doing so, we won’t get to the root of our division. It wasn’t until recently that the root has been brought to light. It has been brought to the consistory by members of the congregation that the preaching is dividing our church. It has been discussed at length in our consistory meetings. It has been discussed at family visitation. It has been protested against.

The issue is our view of polemics and antithetical preaching. To be clear, the issue is not antithetical

preaching (truth vs. lie) altogether, as this is a necessary part of the preaching. The issue is our consistory’s perception of how the antithesis ought to be preached. This is the view our church holds to. The churches in the Reformed Protestant denomination are the only churches who have the uncorrupted truth. No other church of no other denomination has this truth. And since the antithesis requires a continual warfare against all that is untrue, we will draw the sword against all who are not Reformed Protestant. This view requires us to condemn every church, preacher, and individual with the harshest possible condemnation if they do not belong to this particular institution. We view them as “dogs and pigs,” feral pigs who you mow down with a machine gun from a helicopter. We despise and hate them because they are not of us. We are to separate ourselves from our families, shunning them as though they have no place in the kingdom of heaven, regardless of their godly walk and confession. The office bearers are to rebuke the members of the congregation who have fellowship with family members outside of the RPC. If we do not continually rebuke them, then the office bearers, along with those “wandering” members, have no love for the truth.

These rebukes and condemnations have come. They have come relentlessly from the consistory and the pulpit. Many in the congregation feel beaten and are exhausted. Some have cried out to the consistory for help. Others have told the pastor directly. The consistory’s response has been this. “The truth hurts. It cuts as a sharp sword, and our flesh needs this cutting. Our flesh doesn’t like to be cut but we need it, and if they don’t believe it, it is because they don’t love the truth!” (This is a paraphrased quote, not verbatim)

The consistory knows the pushing of this antithetical view is what is dividing our congregation. What the congregation hears after bringing their grievances is not a word of comfort for their weary souls. It is not what Isaiah brought to a downcast people. Isaiah 61:1-3 “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; [2] To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; [3] To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to

give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.” When the sheep are downcast, they need to hear that they are “trees of righteousness” rather than that they “wander to Sodom.”

What is of additional concern is that we are not teaching the lambs of the congregation to fight for the truth. We are preparing them to be warmongers who hate all those outside of the RPC. We are teaching them to condemn everybody. I say this from personal experience. After church a couple weeks ago our 8 year old son told us that a Protestant Reformed family with whom we have a close friendship does not love God. “They can’t love God because they go to a church who doesn’t preach about God. They preach about man. If they loved God they would not be in that church. That’s why we had to leave.”

Our consistory would have rejoiced at this child’s “confession,” except he really doesn’t believe it. He was repeating what he hears at church. Oh, he understands quite well

why we left the PRC, but he doesn’t believe that everyone there hates God. He doesn’t believe it because he is taught contrary to that in the home. I refuse to teach him to condemn everyone outside the RPC. Rather, I teach him to judge whether a man shows himself to be a child of God by his walk and confession.

I am convinced that the preaching will not change in this church. As an office bearer, I cannot teach what this church would require me to teach. As a father, I cannot continue to defend my minister and denomination by telling my children “that’s not what they mean.” For this reason, I cannot remain in this church. And while it grieves me to leave, I am confident that the Lord, as our faithful Shepherd will guide our family, never unto Sodom, but always in the way of truth. With this letter, I request that my membership papers, along with those of Sonja, James, Jorie, Maggie, and Vivian be sent to my home.

Your brother in Christ,
Nick Meelker

OUR DOCTRINE

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

WHAT HAPPENED AT ZION?

A Little Context

Some context is necessary before I respond to Mr. Meelker’s letter. As I write, almost two months have passed since he first sent this letter out to the congregation of Zion. Though by now the letter has not only circulated throughout the Reformed Protestant denomination but has also gone abroad, the actual events leading up to the sending of this letter remain, perhaps, unclear or unknown. A summary of these events is provided below in an announcement that was sent to the congregation of Zion by her consistory in response to Mr. Meelker’s letter:

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ,
We inform you that the consistory has granted the request of Mr. Nick Meelker for the membership papers of his family to be sent to his home.
After the evening service on Sunday 12/10,

Elder Nick Meelker refused to shake Rev. Bomers’ hand due to his disagreement with the sermon. On Monday morning 12/11, Elder Nick Meelker submitted a protest wherein he charged Rev. Bomers with public slander against “all churches in the world who do not belong to the Reformed Protestant denomination” because Rev. Bomers had preached, “No other denomination has that truth, has that standing. It’s all wandering.” This charge was retracted during a consistory meeting on Monday evening 12/11, and matter was resolved.

On Wednesday 12/13, Mr. Nick Meelker requested his membership papers from the consistory. He also sent a public letter to the congregation, wherein he informed the congregation that he has departed because he disagrees with

how the antithesis has been preached in this church and will not defend it. He has faithlessly deserted his office as elder in Zion. The consistory rejects Mr. Meelker's assertion that the preaching in this church is "not a word of comfort for their weary souls." The consistory also stands behind the antithesis as it has been faithfully preached out of the Scripture. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God" 1 John 4:1.

"God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof" Psalm 46:1-3.

In Christ's service

Consistory of Zion RPC

As this announcement makes clear, a few important events took place before Mr. Meelker sent out his letter. All began when the former elder disagreed with my sermon on 2 Peter 3:17–18 that was preached on December 10, 2023.¹ After the evening service was concluded, he gave a public show of disapproval by refusing to shake my hand.

The following morning Mr. Meelker submitted a protest against the sermon to the consistory and charged me with public slander. Since Mr. Meelker's actions were all public, I see no ethical reason that this protest cannot also be published, nor do I have any hesitation to bring this document to light. Here is the protest against the sermon on 2 Peter 3:17–18:

Dear consistory of Zion RPC,

I write to protest the teaching of Rev. Bomers in the sermon "Final Doxology," preached December 10, 2023. Attached is an excerpt from the sermon with which I am aggrieved.

"The congregation here has been given a standing, as that truth that centers in Christ has been developed and has increased throughout over two millennia. You, at present, Zion, have been given an astounding standing; a standing that is unlike any other church of any other denomination; an incredible, gracious, and marvelous insight into God's covenant. And I want to stress that to you. I want to stress that to you this evening. What is the standing that you have been given? It's this. All that governs all things

in this world is Christ and the decree of the covenant. That is God's everlasting delight. That is the end of salvation. That is the truth according to which God works all things in this world. That is the end of man. To be brought into covenant fellowship with God, and to know God as God is known. For the tabernacle of God to be with men. No other denomination has that truth, has that standing. It's all wandering. They teach the covenant this way. That it's some pact that the Father and the Son hammered out in eternity, so that the Son would assume flesh and work out salvation, and then upon his doing of whatever the Father required, that he would receive heaven and receive a people for his reward.

Does that glorify Christ? And is God exalted in that doctrine through Christ? No! It's in the truth. It's in the standing that you have been given. That God who is himself a covenant God, as triune, will reveal that covenant through Christ. That relationship of friendship and fellowship. Not a bargaining, not a cold agreement, not a pact. It is the end of salvation itself. Not a means unto salvation, not something that is discarded along the way. No other church has that. I should say no other church of no other denomination. That is the standing that Christ has given to you."

The main point in this part of the sermon is this. Zion RPC, and really the Reformed Protestant denomination has been given this standing. "All that governs all things in this world is Christ and the decree of the covenant." Rev. Bomers goes on to say "No other denomination has that truth, has that standing. It's all wandering." He then gives an example of what "they" teach. That is to say every other church that is not in the Reformed Protestant denomination teaches some form of heretical doctrine regarding the sovereignty of God and the decree of his covenant, whatever it may be. This is an assertive and unprovable charge against every church that is not Reformed Protestant. The condemning charge against all churches can simply not be proven by giving vague examples of false doctrines in some churches. This is slanderous, which slander the Lord condemns. Proverbs 10:18 "He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool." Slander is a violation of the ninth commandment. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." Exodus 20:16.

¹ Luke Bomers, "Final Doxology," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1QJZYfYRII>.

I urge you to reconsider the rash condemnation of all churches in the world who do not belong to the Reformed Protestant denomination and to see this as the sin of public slander. May God redirect your hearts through the consideration of this protest.

Your brother in Christ,
Nick Meelker

Zion's consistory met Monday evening, December 11, to judge the elder's protest. The consistory did not sustain Mr. Meelker's protest on the basis of the following grounds:

Ground 1. The peculiar standing of the Reformed Protestant churches, and Zion Reformed Protestant Church in particular, is a simple historical fact. No other church shares the heritage that Christ has given to our church. The sermon made this fact clear, and the protestant fails to identify any church that shares our standing. Since we are convicted that this standing is the pure truth, we also teach that all departure from this standing is wandering.

Ground 2. "Q. 112. What is required in the ninth commandment? A. That I bear false witness against *no man*, nor falsify *any man's* words...also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of *my neighbor*." As Lord's Day 43 shows, there must be a specific *man* or *neighbor* that is the object of slander. The protestant's charge of slander cannot stand without specific proof that another church shares the standing of the Reformed Protestant churches.

After this judgment was passed, the elder withdrew his charge of slander and apologized to me. The consistory can bear witness that I joyfully received his apology and encouraged the consistory to continue in their labors.

However, only two days later did it become clear that Mr. Meelker's apology was an empty act. On Wednesday, December 13, Mr. Meelker sent out his letter, wherein he shows clear contempt for the teaching of that sermon. This is evident in two ways. First, he disdains the consistory's conviction that the Reformed Protestant denomination stands alone on the pure truth, saying, "This is the view that our church holds to. The churches in the Reformed Protestant denomination are the only churches who have the uncorrupted truth." Second, he disdains a warning in the sermon against wandering to

Sodom, saying, "When the sheep are downcast, they need to hear that they are 'trees of righteousness' rather than that they 'wander to Sodom.'" (As an aside, Mr. Meelker utters a blatant lie. I never told the members of Zion that "they wander to Sodom." In the light of the text that I preached, I explained what the way to Sodom was, and I warned Zion against that way. But I never told the members that they were going to Sodom. Anyone who listens to this sermon will see that what Mr. Meelker asserts is a disgusting lie.) In his letter Mr. Meelker shows that he still does not agree with what the sermon taught.

Furthermore, Mr. Meelker reveals in his letter that it was not only the sermon that was preached on December 10 that he despised. Mr. Meelker makes reference to "dogs and pigs" and to "feral pigs who you mow down with a machine gun from a helicopter." These references come from previous sermons that I preached in a series on 2 Peter. When Mr. Meelker refers to "feral pigs who you mow down with a machine gun from a helicopter," he quotes from a sermon on 2 Peter 2:10–16 that was preached on September 8, 2023.² When Mr. Meelker refers to "dogs and pigs," he quotes from a sermon on 2 Peter 2:20–22 that was preached on October 1, 2023.³ I shall have more to say about these quotations in a future article, the Lord willing. Here, I point out that, although the former elder never breathed so much as a wisp against these sermons to me at the time that they were preached, it is clear from his letter that he secretly harbored great resentment against them.

These are the events that stand behind Mr. Meelker's letter.

An Introductory Analysis

Now what is your judgment after reading Mr. Meelker's letter?

First, I point out that if what Mr. Meelker wrote is true—if the preaching at Zion wearied and beat and cast down Christ's flock, if the preaching caused division within Christ's body and violently assaulted that spiritual bond between the Head and his members, if in mercy the faithful Shepherd has led Mr. Meelker and his family out of Zion to guide them in the way of truth—then a terrible evil came upon Zion.

However, this letter minces words when the strongest possible language ought to be used. Keep in mind that Mr. Meelker was an elder at Zion. Christ himself charged Mr. Meelker to be diligent in the government of the church and, as a watchman over the house and city of God, to be faithful to admonish and to caution every

2 Luke Bomers, "Going the Way of Balaam," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuY8VVdOKgg>.

3 Luke Bomers, "A Worse End," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7i3cfRGSus&t=2s>.

one against his ruin. Christ charged Mr. Meelker to be an overseer over a church that Christ purchased with his own blood. If the preaching was so unbearably wicked that Mr. Meelker's only proper recourse was to flee, then permit me to say what he left unsaid: "Woe! Woe to the pastor of Zion! Woe to the consistory of Zion! You have destroyed and scattered the sheep of God's pasture! You have driven them away! Christ comes upon you! Christ comes quickly to visit upon you the evil of your doings! Christ comes in righteous fury and holy vengeance to pummel you into the dust for abusing his most precious bride!" This is the warning that ought to have been shouted from the ramparts.

But where is Mr. Meelker's conviction in his letter? He leaves implied what should be stated explicitly—namely, that Christ was not ministering his word at Zion. Christ was not speaking through Zion's pastor. Rather, the minister at Zion was bringing his own personal agenda to the pulpit. From the open sepulcher of his throat, the minister was spewing forth wicked imaginations of his foolish heart, deadly speech from his darkened understanding. Let Mr. Meelker boldly say that what came from Zion's pulpit was not the word of God but the word of man. If all that Mr. Meelker wrote is true, then there should be no hesitation in asserting that the minister at Zion committed the most heinous and wicked thing that a minister of the word can do: he sought by false doctrine to drive a wedge between Christ and his church. If all that Mr. Meelker wrote is true, then it would be good for that minister at Zion to be cast into the sea with a millstone hung about his neck. If all that Mr. Meelker wrote is true, then there should be no hesitation in warning all who defend the preaching at Zion that they only strengthen the hands of the evildoer. Where is Mr. Meelker's call to God's people to flee from the hireling and the wolf?

All those who have now left Zion and have either returned to Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Redlands or departed for the local Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and all those who are not members of Zion but sympathize with what Mr. Meelker has written—do not cower behind softened speech or hesitate to say anything less than this!

One ought not mince words if such a terrible offense has occurred in the church. Let all those who sympathize with Mr. Meelker also affirm with the apostle: "If any

man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy" (1 Cor. 3:17). If what Mr. Meelker wrote is true, then his letter is weak—*pathetically* weak—in its condemnation of this alleged evil occurring in God's holy house.

Second, I judge Mr. Meelker's letter to be not only pathetically weak but also astoundingly wicked. Mr. Meelker may be soft in his condemnation of the preaching at Zion. But I will not be soft in my response to his letter.

Mr. Meelker was confronted with the glorious name of God in the preaching. Mr. Meelker was confronted with God's glorious sovereignty as it was faithfully expounded from 2 Peter. Mr. Meelker was confronted with the awesome truth of God's decree of election and reprobation as it lives on the pages of Peter's second epistle. When the apostle speaks of false teachers and the hordes that follow after them, the apostle does not keep God's decree at a distance, distinguishing between pagans and church-going people. No, the apostle brings God's decree of election and reprobation to bear upon false teachers who rise up "among you" (2 Pet. 2:1). With great swelling words of vanity, these false teachers whose names you know allure people who you know. These false teachers and those who follow them are former acquaintances and friends and lovers. And when such things happen in the church—as the inspired apostle promised that they will—how does one interpret these things? In light of God's living decree! For in eternity God determined that he will be glorified in his gracious deliverance of his beloved elect and in his just condemnation of the ungodly reprobate *in the midst of the church*. God manifests his decree *in the sphere of the covenant*. But when the preaching at Zion applied this truth to the historical and ecclesiastical context of today, Mr. Meelker hated it. Despising the application of the truth, he despises the truth of God's decree. And despising the decree, he despises God. That is what this letter demonstrates: a hatred of God.

And all that this letter becomes is a cloak for Mr. Meelker's unbelief in the doctrine of reprobation. What lies lurking beneath all Mr. Meelker's words is his unbelief that God actually rejects many who say to Christ, "Lord, Lord." Next time, I will demonstrate this unbelief with three specific examples. In the meantime, you may judge Mr. Meelker's letter yourself in light of the sermons that have been referenced in the footnotes.

—LB

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

FAITH AND PROMISE

Introduction

I was a fourth-generation member of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and proud of it. From a young age I knew the names Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Danhof like other kids might know Elmo, Cookie Monster, and Big Bird. If I had a favorite flower, it was certainly the TULIP. And if something called for a four-digit code, there was a better-than-average chance that it was set to 1-9-2-4. As the Jews of Jesus' day boasted in having Abraham as their father, I had Hoeksema to my father.

Having grown up as a card-carrying member of the PRC, I am now in a position to reflect on the impact that had on my spiritual and doctrinal development. What was the gospel of the PRC? What was her gospel as that gospel came to and made an impression on a young mind? What was the fruit of that gospel in my own heart? Some reflection has shown me that answering these questions provides insight into the present state of doctrine in the PRC as that doctrine has been brought more and more to light amidst the recent reformation that led to the founding of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC).

Active Faith

The best way I can think of to illustrate how the gospel of the PRC made an impression on my psyche is to begin with Lord's Day 7. As I have known from childhood, true faith is

not only a certain knowledge...but also an assured confidence...that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are, freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90–91)

I can remember wrestling specifically with the matter of “not only to others, but to me also.” Oh yes, of course God has given true faith to “others,” and those “others” are saved. That is easy. If God saves anyone, then surely some “others” are saved. But also to me? How do I get that? How do I place myself in the same company as those “others”? Yes, yes, I believe the scriptures; yes, I believe that Christ is the only savior from sin and that he

has effectually redeemed all of his own. Salvation is objectively a possibility, but how can I know that it applies to me?

This certainly made the “assured confidence” of faith to be something of a challenge. If I have true faith, why all my doubting? If I am able to muster up some sort of assurance, what if that is just my own psychology protecting me because the thought of not being saved is too awful to contemplate? I even pondered my deathbed. Knowing that doubt itself is a sin, what if I still have glimmerings of doubt in my final hour and, dying with that sin of doubt, go forever lost?

My solution—such as it was—to this wrestling was twofold. First, I knew that I was in the best church. The PRC had the truth; this I did not doubt. So, I reasoned that as long as I was a member of the best church, I could not go lost. What more can one possibly do than be a faithful member of the best church? *Do* being the operative word, I realize now that this was nothing more than works-righteousness. My church membership and my good standing therein are simply works. On the doctrine of true faith, which ought to be where the gospel is taught in its purest and simplest form, I had come to consistently look to and depend on my works for my comfort and assurance. Like I said, I grew up Protestant Reformed.

The other element of my solution had to do with the meaning and place of *believing*. Believing is not actually mentioned in question and answer 21 on true faith, but I knew that I had to believe. But how? Oh yes, Christ died to save sinners, those “others.” Objectively, there is salvation to be had out there, but on what grounds can I believe that it is also for me?

It appeared to me that believing was one of two possibilities. Believing could be a sort of blind, optimistic hoping that you are one for whom Christ died. This was unsatisfactory because it has no substance and absolutely nothing to stop doubt from constantly creeping in. The second possibility was that believing could be a sort of exertion of the mental faculties whereby one *believes*, perhaps with sweat beading on the brow and veins bulging on the forehead, that Christ is one's savior. Perhaps by such a Herculean effort of believing, one could be assured that Christ indeed died not only for others but also for

oneself, and in so doing kindle a flame of faith sufficient to finally dispel one's plaguing doubts.

I am convinced that this latter depiction of believing is what is meant in today's terminology by the proponents of "active faith." Man, we are told, must do something to be saved, and that something is (among other things nowadays) *believing*. *Actively* believing. Believing that you must do because God does not do it for you! So man must (by grace, of course) muster up his believing, and by that believing he can finally obtain Christ and the assurance that all of Christ's benefits are also for him.

The Philippian Jailor

To my chagrin, having arrived at the doctrine of active believing, I nevertheless was not carried aloft to the mountaintops of faith and assurance. In the process of time, I came to realize that the question with which I was wrestling was the same question as that of the Philippian jailor: "What must I do to be saved?" In the providence of God, I came to find Herman Hoeksema's now-famous sermon titled "The Calling of the Philippian Jailor." Readers of this magazine will be familiar both with the sermon and with the role it played in the recent doctrinal controversy that led to the formation of the RPC. But several years before the doctrine of that sermon was declared to be "Nonsense!" I was a teenager in my bedroom with tears welling up in my eyes, hearing for the first time, "Do nothing!"

In the historical context in which he preached the sermon, Hoeksema's "do nothing" was antithetical to the theology of Rev. Hubert De Wolf, which theology is most easily summarized in his infamous statement, "God promises everyone of you that, if you believe, you shall be saved." The immediate occasion for Hoeksema's sermon on the Philippian jailor was to answer the challenge of those De Wolf sympathizers who fled to Acts 16:30–31 as their doctrinal fortress. As perhaps the foremost text in all of scripture on the call of the gospel, this text represented the entire battle line of 1953. One side represented Hoeksema, the unconditional covenant, and the Reformed faith, while the other side represented De Wolf, conditions, and Arminianism.

So, too, in our recent controversy, Hoeksema's exegesis of the Philippian jailor text was *the* tipping point. The disparagement of his exegesis in the *Standard Bearer* was the impetus that led to the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing with its magazine *Sword and Shield*. Flurries of articles and letters began to circulate as the sermon re-emerged into the spotlight. Today, just as when it was originally preached, where one stands with regard to that text determines whether one holds to the theology of Herman Hoeksema and the historical PRC or whether

one holds to the doctrine of the PRC of today, which can be summarized most efficiently as "If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do."

The Promise

It is no longer surprising to me that the battle lines in our recent controversy parallel so closely with those of 1953. With reflection I believe I have begun to grasp why this has been the case. The issue is the promise.

I remember having a discussion in high school with a classmate regarding what exactly was wrong with De Wolf's statement, "God promises everyone of you..." It is a testament to the PRC's rearing of my generation that we sincerely struggled to pin down the error. De Wolf's statement was the arch-heretical statement from the history of our denomination, and we did not have an answer for it. Surely, we reasoned, God does not lie. It could never be that someone would believe and yet not be saved. God promises. If you believe, you will surely be saved. And if you do not believe, you will not be saved. That too is sure. God does not save unbelievers! It almost appeared like a rather banal statement of objective fact.

The promise was a mere, objective fact. *That*, I believe, was the central error to my own thinking growing up. That was what I had imbibed as the zeitgeist of the PRC I grew up in. The promise was *out there*. It was a *thing* that was *true*. It was often adorned with the most flowery language—marvelous promises, beautiful promises, joyful promises. And yet I never quite grasped what that was all about. I think I generally took it to mean that God said quite a lot of good and nice things to his people, and we were supposed to take those things as our comfort, hope, and peace as we lived our lives.

Of course, I knew that the promise had to do with Christ. Many of the passages that a person raised in the church is familiar with from a young age are those directly messianic prophecies that promise the coming Christ. But the effect of linking those two—Christ and the promise—in my mind was only to come to the understanding that Christ too was *out there*. In that connection I would say that it was embarrassingly late in life that I actually understood Christmas. A child can become so distracted by the presents and the carols and the trappings of Christmastime, and Luke 2 can be read so frequently that one becomes numb to it. So I can say that all I used to grasp was that Christmas was about the *fact* that Jesus was born.

The promise was a *fact*. The incarnation was a *fact*. So also Christ's life, work, death, and all his saving benefits were all *facts*.

For whom do these facts actually avail anything in the realization of salvation?

To others? Certainly.

But also to me?

Hence I returned to the same mire that I had struggled in with regard to Lord's Day 7. And same as her gospel of Lord's Day 7, the gospel of the PRC of today with regard to the promise and to all the saving benefits of Christ is that of active faith. You must do something to be saved, to receive the promises, and to partake of Christ's benefits. Exercise yourself in the activity of believing, and you also can be blessed.

Yea and Amen

In contrast to this stands the truth of the promise. The promise that always comes to the undeserving and the powerless and the wretched and promises unconditionally that which is utterly impossible. The promise to trembling Adam and Eve was that the head of Satan, their new rightful master and lord, would be crushed by the seed of the woman. The promise to ninety-year-old Abraham was that he would be a father of many nations by his barren wife, Sarah. The promise to the nascent nation of Israel was that the nation would inherit the land of Canaan, though the Israelites were as grasshoppers before the giants of the land. To Gideon, that it was a small thing to the Lord to deliver by many or by few. To David, that his son would sit upon the throne of David forever. To Naboth, that he had an everlasting inheritance in the heavenly promised land. To a deathly ill Hezekiah, that he would be restored. And to Mary, that she would conceive and bear a son, having not known a man.

All of God's promises are essentially Christ. Christ is both the possibility and the certainty of all of God's impossible promises because Christ is God in the flesh. If the infinite God can be united to a finite human nature; if the holy God can dwell on this sin-cursed earth; if the exalted, independent God can become a sucking child who can hunger and thirst and weep and die; then you are saved. Then every barren womb is made fruitful, every giant is slain, every sickness is healed, and you will go to heaven. All of our barrenness and death and emptiness is on account of our sins. But if God came in the flesh, your sins are forgiven, and every blessing of salvation is yours. Thus Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day and was glad.

By her doctrine of active faith, the PRC denies this reality. I participated in that ecclesiastical pride whereby if I knew anything at all, it was that the PRC was the best church. In the PRC was the truth. But by the doctrine of active faith, that truth does not avail in salvation. The truth of scripture and the promises of God are merely objective facts and possibilities, which are made of effect to you once you exert yourself in the act of believing. How often was not the exhortation heard that we must

not just have heads full of doctrinal knowledge but that we must have a knowledge that comes from the heart? Many times I heard this, and I would stumble over it. What does heart knowledge look like? Surely I had the head knowledge, probably more than my peers, but what of this heart knowledge? Was I missing some component of emotional fervor or inward piety that I ought to have had bubbling out of my heart?

I was missing the gospel. I was being made to look at what I was doing, what I had to add to make saving faith effectual. But the gospel is that heart knowledge *is not what you do*. Oh, true enough, no one is saved by a headful of facts. Saving faith is a matter of the heart. *But that is not what you do*. That knowledge of the heart is the work of the Holy Spirit whereby the savor of the knowledge of Christ is made to be a savor of life unto life in the elect (2 Cor. 2:14–16). The savor of the gospel wherein Christ is set forth as the heart of God's counsel to be the mediator of the covenant and the savior of the elect church is spread abroad in the proclamation of the gospel, and the Spirit *causes* that to resonate in the hearts of his elect. Thus the elect believe on Jesus Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen, and the elect rest and rely alone on Christ's perfect work. They do nothing for their salvation, confessing that by Christ's work alone salvation is accomplished.

Death unto Death

That same gospel is a savor of death unto death. The reprobate to whom the gospel comes have all the same facts and all the same head knowledge that the elect have. But that those facts and knowledge do not avail unto salvation is not because the reprobate fail or refuse to actively believe them. It is because they do not believe them at all. They deny the truth of the doctrines they purport to confess.

When you believe that man must first act *before* and *so that* God can bestow some benefit of salvation, you deny the incarnation. If man's role is decisive in the reception of the promise, then there may as well have been a role of a man in the incarnation as the central realization of the promise. Then Jesus is indeed the carpenter's son. If you believe that sins were not actually forgiven at the cross, you deny the resurrection, for Christ must remain dead and buried if his people were not justified by his atoning death.

Q. 30. Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

A. They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things

must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior, or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 95)

Those who insert the work or activity of man into the accomplishment or reception of the promise deny Christ, the gospel, and all the doctrines of the gospel. Notwithstanding their claim to a doctrinal pedigree and their profession to love the truth, their doctrine reveals them as unbelievers. When the sweet savor of the gospel comes to them, they reject it, add to it, or otherwise mutilate it. To them it is not the promise of the free forgiveness of sins and everlasting life, so that they rest and rely on Christ alone. It is instead a condemnation of all their pride, their self-righteousness, and their refusal to become nothing before God. It savors to them of their certain destruction.

Peace

Belief of the gospel proceeds from God's eternal decree. The gospel sets forth Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of

all of God's promises and declares that all of salvation is in him, apart from anything that man does. All of God's children whom God has eternally chosen and has engrafted into Jesus Christ receive the Spirit of Christ in their hearts; and by the work of the Spirit, they believe. Not as their work, their activity, or as a process of mental deduction or exertion, but as the Spirit's work in them to cause them to know and delight in Christ as their savior and in God as the God of their salvation. So the Christian's assurance must be rooted in the decree of election. Out of this assured confidence flow all the fruits of the Christian life, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. Out of this assurance also flows the peace of God that passes understanding, that his promise is sure, though all things may appear to be against us. For Christ, who has fully accomplished our salvation, now sits exalted at the right hand of God and directs all things for the salvation of his people and the perfection of his covenant.

—Ryan Schipper

INSIGHTS

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

VAIN JANGLING

From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers.—1 Timothy 1:6–9

Many commentators define the phrase “vain jangling” as *idle words of no profit*. You could just as well define the phrase used in this text as *peddling something that has no value*. During the past few years in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), God's people have been subjected to much vain jangling. Powerful men, who are supposed to be leading the sheep and guiding their souls, have revealed their jangling ways by their empty words and the wares they sell.

Have you ever gone to a sporting event or to a flea

market where outside the main event there are those who catch you on the side street and try to hustle you out of your money by selling inferior, poorly made products? It is the same feeling you get at a garage sale when you find a great tool that you have been looking for, only to discover it was poorly made in China and is of inferior quality.

Some live out this analogy in the church and say, “The truth is marred everywhere, so I will take the inferiority of the truth.”

God will not be mocked!

This vain jangling is what we were under and what many whom I love are still under in the PRC and in other denominations apprehended by these vain peddlers and their smoke and mirrors. The street hustlers of the church, though, are not shady men with outwardly nefarious intentions, but they are handsome, winsome men dressed in fine attire and who speak very confidently of what they are selling and trying to get you to buy.

Martin Luther knew of this kind of buying and selling. He was privy to many of these types of scams. Having recently departed from the Roman Catholic Church of his day, Luther knew that it was commonplace for men as officers of the church to sell indulgences for future forgiveness of sins. The German friar Tetzl was known for saying, "As soon as the gold in the casket rings, the rescued soul to heaven springs."

How is that any different than what is being preached today in the Reformed church world? Maybe the phrases sound a little different, and maybe it is harder to track where the financial gain is found in the end. But in essence it is the same theology to make repentance precede the forgiveness of your sins and the knowledge that you have been forgiven in eternity according to your election in Christ. That is not the truth though, for we read in Ephesians 1:4–9,

4. According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:
5. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,
6. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.
7. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;
8. Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;
9. Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

There is no longer a Tetzl, but there are others who peddle the same indulgences. These peddlers prey mainly on the weak and the poor, knowing that keeping men's knowledge of their salvation out of reach is the peddlers' greatest power and influence. Why do they do this? So that the weak and indigent will come to these peddlers and give allegiance to them! The rich are preyed on too; the peddlers in the end need the coffers of the wealthy on their side. The hard part with the wealthy is that they can actually "pay off" their sin-debt for a time and feel assured

that they and their loved ones are partakers of eternal life. Do not worry, the rich will be repeat customers.

Ephesians 1:9 says, "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself." I understand this to mean that God by his rich grace makes known to his people their salvation, wholly apart from their working. God does this through faith alone! That faith is worked by the Spirit through the chief means of grace, the preaching of the gospel. Yet in the PRC the ministers preach that the experience of your salvation cannot be realized until you shed tears of repentance. But how do you know your sins, unless you have been given the knowledge of how great a sinner you truly are? How can you have that knowledge except the Holy Spirit gives to you the gift of faith?

Not too long ago, teachers in the PRC taught that repentance was the first good work or fruit of faith. Now in the PRC the teaching is that repentance is the fulcrum on which all of salvation hinges. Repentance is not only taught as the prerequisite for forgiveness; but repentance as a prerequisite for forgiveness is also defended as the gospel so that no man may think to know that he is saved, that no man can taste the riches of heaven, until and unless he sheds a tear of his work of repentance. No wonder the sheep are absolutely terrified from week to week and why many flock to the world for counseling and seek help from the world's medications to ease their troubled minds.

That is why Canons 1.9 is so beautiful to the Christian.

This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to that of the apostle: *He hath chosen us* (not because we were, but) *that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love* (Eph. 1:4). (*Confessions and Church Order*, 157)

Making repentance a prerequisite for forgiveness is the crime of mixing the law and gospel in the preaching of salvation. When a church takes the law and makes it a doable service, then man must start doing it, or else. This is what the Roman Catholic Church did and does to those under its theology. This is what drove Martin Luther mad to the point that God plucked him out of that crucible and forced him to confess in 1521,

If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true and not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly, for he is victorious over sin, death, and the world.¹

Professor Cammenga of the Protestant Reformed Churches preaches only a fictitious grace. We are reminded of the discourse he has had over the past couple of years but especially his agreement with the Roman Catholic understanding of faith according to the Council of Trent. In that council the Romish religion states,

If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof: let him be anathema.²

What we hear from Professor Cammenga is, “We may not deny that our good works are *always* fruit. But Scripture does not allow us to say they are *only* fruit.”³ This discourse is purely vain jangling. It is at best either a complete ignorance of the truth that the child of God longs to live a life of thankfulness, or at worst it is an attempt to move the children of God off the position that by faith in Jesus Christ alone we are complete in Christ, who is the head of all principality and power (Col. 2:10). Professor Cammenga’s writings against those who say that good works are only fruit and that as fruit alone, good works do hold a great place in the lives of the children of God, are only detriments to the great cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ to bring freedom in their lives. Professor Cammenga believes that the place of the living sacrifices of regenerated children of God is somehow on another level than “only fruit.” He writes,

Scripture speaks of the good works of the child of God not only as fruit, but also as the conscious, willing activity of the believer. One way in which Scripture does this is by speaking of our good works as the sacrifice of praise that we willingly offer up to God.⁴

Why stress that good works are something more than fruit? Why stress that good works are also the willing

activity of the believer? Why be afraid of the gospel? A theology that reminds everyone that their works are more than “only fruit” and that they must also be active in willing sacrifices of praise, so that they do not just have “good works” on the exterior, seems like a theology that is scared that God’s people are free and that now that they are free in Christ, they will all start living like devils. I really pity that theology; I pity those who teach and stress that theology of man’s living a conscious, willing life of sacrifice so that one’s life might be viewed as more than fruit in God’s eyes and in man’s eyes. That theology is weak and false and will only turn men into a bunch of white-walled sepulchers.

What does scripture really teach us? “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise, grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise, work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6).

And what do our Reformed confessions say of Christ and his perfect work? Article 21 of the Belgic Confession says,

We **believe** that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High Priest, after the order of Melchisedec; and that He hath presented Himself in our behalf before the Father to appease His wrath by His full satisfaction, by offering Himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out His precious blood to purge away our sins, as the prophets had foretold... Therefore, *He restored that which He took not away, and suffered, the just for the unjust...* and hath suffered all this for the remission of our sins.

Wherefore we justly say with the apostle Paul, that *we know nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified; we count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord*, in whose wounds we find all manner of consolation. Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever. This is also the reason why He was called by the angel of God, *Jesus*, that is to say, *Savior*, because He would save His people from their sins. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 47–49, emphasis in bold added)

Yet men do not count all things but loss and dung! Men count things gain and sweet smelling! They say,

1 Martin Luther, “Letter to Philip Melancthon, Wartburg, August 1, 1521,” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 48:281–82.

2 The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, sixth session, “Decree on Justification,” in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 2:115.

3 Ronald Cammenga, “Response,” *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 10 (February 15, 2021): 226.

4 Cammenga, “Response,” 226.

“Look what God has enabled me to do now as regenerated!” They say, “But I do obey the law occasionally; I do obey; I do love my neighbor...sometimes.” We give to God our good works—done perfectly in principle, yet wholly polluted—and tell him that he must be satisfied with them, and we tell ourselves that we must feel satisfied by them. Just like that, the perfect work of Jesus Christ is displaced!

What does Philippians 3 tell us?

8. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,
9. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

14. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Yes! Fellow believer, press toward the mark. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that all your works are but dung and believe that Christ has saved you apart from your works. Knowing by faith alone that God has created us unto good works, that we might present ourselves as living sacrifices. That our lives are lives of thankfulness and only thankfulness. That a thankful life is fruit and only fruit, but what a great calling that is. But never may we take that fruit and make it more than what it is. We just confessed with the Belgic Confession that we may not seek or invent ways to be reconciled to God. This includes the experience of the remission of sins! Which is the experience of our justification! Which is justification!

Man loves to feel that he has done something, though. He will not become the ungodly but only somewhat of a sinner. He looks at his nice house, his pretty wife, and his clean kids and says, “Yes, of course, I am a sinner, but look at that guy across the street! He is profane!” Yet, whether it is his good works, pious life, or incredibly humble repentance, man will do something for God. Not to merit! Oh, no! Never to merit! That would be heretical. But to experience! To taste! To know! To abide! That is something which man does, by grace, of course. And do not forget that doing has faith as its partner; do not leave faith out of it, but man must *do!* Yes, I can, I want, I must, I do so that...—and the coin hits the casket—and all is well, and in his mind the man goes home justified.

But, believer, you know all is not well in that theology;

it is “glawspel,” the mixture of law and gospel, of *do* and *done*. It is so sad to see men, women, and children burdened under the weight of how they *need* to live in order to taste the experience of their salvation. For we all remember this infamous saying,

That little child doesn't think to himself, “Now, the more that I embrace my mother and hug her, the more I'll earn this fellowship with her.” But he understands it's in hugging her that I'm enjoying fellowship with her, and he understands: the more I do this—the more I hug and embrace her—the more I will enjoy her embrace and fellowship as well. Well, so it is with the life of conversion and good works. If the life of good works is the life of living in joy and fellowship with God, then, you understand, the more you do that, the more of that joy and fellowship you will have. It really is something like this: the more you fellowship with God, the more you enjoy fellowship with God. And because the life of turning from sin and living in obedience to God is the life of fellowship with him, the more you do that, the more you will enjoy the love of God your Father for Jesus' sake.⁵

Do these sheep not realize that they do not have the real coin that it takes to taste, to know, to abide in Christ? Do they not know that it is only on the basis and merit of Jesus Christ, by faith alone, that we know this? I think they do know that they do not have the real coin; I think some know that the vain jangling is all a charade. The preacher calls for repentance, for holiness, for pious living, without which no man shall see the Lord; and all the while some in the crowd say, “Sure, pastor, here it is; this is what I give; this is all I will or can give.” I wonder what is going through their heads? For they are not like those who *actually believe* that what they do gives them *more or less* fellowship with God. I bet they think to themselves, “Well, that is not what I believe about my salvation; I do count all things but dung and loss, but it is not worth the hassle of telling this man otherwise, so I guess I will shake his hand after the sermon.”

The gospel though cannot be bought! Only one can pay for sins, and only one can earn the forgiveness of sins. The gospel cannot be pressed down out of the mind of the child of God for long. Christ has overcome! He gives his Spirit to his people, and that Spirit cannot be held down by the power of persuasion or the hard look of man. That is the comfort I live with, that I am the

5 Clayton Spronk, “Christian Conversion,” sermon preached in Faith Protestant Reformed Church on September 13, 2020, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=104201510121151>.

chief of sinners and that God justifies the ungodly wholly apart from what I have done and what I am able to do as a regenerated child of God. What freedom! What a truth! Not to be afraid of the gospel but to live in all its truth unashamed of election, of reprobation, and of being a sinner who is saved by grace alone! Some say that the Reformed Protestant Churches have made laws and precepts unto salvation. I do not believe that, for the truths taught in the denomination bring forth lives of thankfulness and covenantal understanding that keep those thankful lives as fruits, merely as fruits, our reasonable service. Not unto, but because of. That is the Reformed understanding, is it not?

To those who are being preyed upon, be comforted to know that our God is a great God, that he will not

be mocked. To those who offend, woe! To those who sell the gospel by another name, woe to thee! To those who distress the poor and widows and little ones, woe to thee! To those who take justification by faith alone and peddle obedience as a requirement to taste of that justification, woe to thee! “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6). Wolves in sheep’s clothing, hucksters selling cheap wares. Brothers, people of God—do not be fooled by fool’s gold! Walk by faith in the truths that you have been taught and live in the freedom of the free grace of Jesus Christ.

—James Jansma

CONTRIBUTION

LABOR! LABOR! LABOR!

Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28). For those who are cast down in the despair of man’s working for rest, the infirmity of our flesh, the text quoted above is almost unbelievable. How can this be? Rest for the weary and heavy laden? Peace with God?

I will attempt to demonstrate two opposing doctrines regarding the means of receiving rest, covenant fellowship with God, and therefore the experience of salvation. One doctrine by the then Rev. Ronald Van Overloop, which doctrine is deeply entrenched in the Protestant Reformed Churches, is the experience of salvation (covenant fellowship) in the way of obedience to the law, by grace, of course. This way of obedience is the labor of man.

Labor! Labor! Labor!

Mixing man’s labor with grace and faith does not make this doctrine orthodox. It is the same doctrine of conditional covenant fellowship that the then Reverend Van Overloop taught openly, and it is theology that has never been condemned in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The other doctrine of receiving rest, covenant fellowship with God, and therefore the experience of salvation is the truth of scripture and the Reformed creeds, that is,

the doctrine of salvation by faith alone without regard to man’s works. This is the doctrine that Rev. Herman Hoeksema preached and taught throughout his ministry.

On November 15, 2020, the then Rev. Ronald Van Overloop preached a sermon titled “Calling toward Remaining Canaanites.” In this sermon he thrashed the sheep of Jesus Christ with the law of God for their salvation with no hope of the rest proposed. This sermon was the end of a Christless, election-less, comfortless, and hopeless series of sermons on Joshua and Israel’s conquest of Canaan. Ronald Van Overloop should have taken heed to Psalm 44:1–8, which is the Holy Spirit’s explanation of Israel’s conquest of Canaan:

1. We have heard with our ears, *O God*, our fathers have told us, *what work thou didst in their days*, in the times of old.
2. *How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand*, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out.
3. *For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light*

of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.

4. Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.
5. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.
6. *For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.*
7. *But thou hast saved us from our enemies*, and hast put them to shame that hated us.
8. *In God we boast all the day long*, and praise thy name for ever. (Ps. 44:1–8, emphasis added)

The whole series of sermons on Joshua and Israel's conquest of Canaan was an abominable affront to God and a denial of God's sovereignty.

That November 15, 2020, sermon, among others, was protested to the consistory of Grace Protestant Reformed Church. The protest was met with what seemed like a fruitless outcome, but God's word will not return to him void and will accomplish what God pleases. Before the consistory of Grace church even received the protest, the elders silently took the "Calling toward Remaining Canaanites" sermon off SermonAudio because the consistory had received so many "complaints" about the sermon. The other sermons in the series remained online, and the theology of those sermons certainly remains firmly entrenched in the Protestant Reformed Churches, so much so that it is profitable to critique the false theology of the "Calling toward Remaining Canaanites" sermon and to proclaim the truth over against it.

That sermon had more false doctrine in it than what is refuted in this short article, and the sermon sent the listeners down so many rabbit holes that the main topic was obscured; but the main doctrine of the sermon was that Israel and the next generation of Israelites were given responsibilities as *means* to enter into the rest of Canaan. The false doctrine in the sermon was not that God's people have callings in the covenant of grace: loving God with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength and loving their neighbors as themselves—obedience as a fruit of faith. But the false doctrine in the sermon was that it taught that the Israelites' obedience—and by specific application, our obedience—was the *means* that God used to bring his people into the rest of Canaan, a type of the rest of heaven, the perfect tabernacle of God with men.

To serve his devilish doctrine, Van Overloop quoted from Deuteronomy 10 (the giving of the law to Moses) and Hebrews 4:11: "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." He quoted from Deuteronomy 10 to show

that the responsibility of the people of Israel was to keep God's commandments; and by quoting Hebrews 4:11, he connected the responsibility of keeping the commandments with the labor that enters into the rest. And he even called man's obedience to the commandments the *means* of entering into the rest.

The primary focus that we want to take before us this evening is the responsibilities, the calling, that God gave to Joshua and the children of Israel, really the children of Israel not just Joshua, towards those remaining Canaanites. God will not leave him free of the responsibilities to serve God, but now in a different way.

This is an orthodox statement taken by itself to explain the theme, but we will see how Van Overloop developed this to make the obedience of man the way or the means alongside God's work to accomplish salvation. Joshua was advanced in age, but according to the sermon, he could not be *free of responsibilities*. Oh, no! So Van Overloop preached a graciousness of God that supposedly took into account Joshua's advanced age: God gave to Joshua age-specific responsibilities (conditions) that Joshua was able to perform. From cradle to grave, Joshua and the Israelites were not free to serve God.

After quoting Deuteronomy 10 and especially verses 12–13: "Fear the LORD thy God...walk in all his ways...love him...serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul...keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command you this day," Van Overloop preached this:

God's sovereignty, man's responsibility.

God's gifts and Christ's merits does not exclude God's use of means, does not exclude God's gift of the *use of the means of our obedience*.

One more time: God's gifts and Christ's merits does not exclude God's sovereign use of the means of *our obedience*. So as the inspired word in Hebrews 4:11 says, "Labour...to enter into the rest, lest [ye] fall...[in] unbelief." *Labor* to enter into the rest, lest ye fall in unbelief, Hebrews 4:11. *And that labor is what is identified in Deuteronomy 10:12: keep my commandments*. God's sovereignty never removes responsibility because responsibility is determined by God's commandments.

After that, still more from the sermon: "So God sovereignly uses human responsibility—a responsibility that is determined by his commandments."

As laid out previously in *Sword and Shield*, this sermon continued with one of the clearest statements of two-track theology that has ever been preached in the

Protestant Reformed Churches since 1953. The whole sermon—and the prevailing theology in the Protestant Reformed Churches that teaches that the blessings of God are given in the way of man’s obedience—was the two-track theology and the synergistic doctrine of God and man working together by grace to accomplish God’s purpose.

And more from the sermon:

It was through Christ, who strengthened me. Not me. It was through Christ. And yet God commanded; I performed a duty. *Two rails*. They go side by side. In the wisdom of God, his sovereignty, our responsibility. And it’s all grace, and nothing but grace.

For Ronald Van Overloop and the elders at Grace church, the obedience of the believer is a rail that the believer rides to heaven along with Christ.

Ronald Van Overloop and the elders at Grace church said that obedience is “all grace.” This grace—which enables the works of the believer—is not *sovereign* grace but must be *some other grace* that is available, for in the sermon God’s sovereignty sat on the other rail. This is not Reformed, for Reformed doctrine is that all men and all of their working are hemmed in by the sovereignty of God. And instead of grace being God’s unmerited favor and the power by which God sovereignly saves his people and works in them all of their salvation and all of their thankful obedience as fruit of that salvation, grace in the sermon was God’s *use of the Israelites’ imperfect obedience as a means to give them the rest of Canaan or to give them their salvation*. So the believer’s salvation is dependent on his obedience as a condition. Joshua and the Israelites were not free to serve God *in* the rest, but they were given responsibilities to keep the commandments *for entering into* the rest.

The doctrine that God enables man to keep the commandments in order for man to enter the rest is hopeless, comfortless, damnable doctrine. There is no hope in it because there is no Christ in it. Is rest in the way of our obedience? Is our obedience the *means* to enter into covenant fellowship with God? That is exactly what the sermon taught, and that is exactly the conditional theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches today. It is a great grief to me.

So the question is, what is the truth? The burden of this short article is to attempt to explain the truth of our fellowship with God, stated as “that rest” in Hebrews 4:11.

Rest, to state it simply, is the fellowship of God. God is a God of rest. He rests in all of his perfectly accomplished work from all eternity in the perfect, triune fellowship of the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Rest is entering into the “perfect enjoyment of a perfectly finished work. That is rest. That is the rest of God.”⁶ God is a God of infinite, holy, pure activity (labor) in the perfect freedom of his eternally accomplished purpose.

God...with all his being, with all his mind and will and spiritual being, he always works to the extent of his being...He is infinite...activity. God never rests in the sense of ceasing from work. In himself...he is a God of activity.⁷

Eternally God works, and eternally his work is finished and perfect.

In his counsel...he beholds all the work, and it stands before him from eternity, and he rejoices in that work. That is election; that is reprobation; that is redemption; that is perfection. Don’t you see that? In his counsel he forevermore rejoices in his glorified elect people.⁸

Rest for man is only in God. God reveals that rest; and as a fruit of election, God causes his people to enter into that rest, into perfect fellowship with the triune God as God’s friend-servants. Rest is being of God’s party. Rest is knowing the one, true God and all of his goodness, graciousness, and mercy as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

Contrast this with the labor of man to enter into the rest! The labor of man to enter rest is the endless toil of man, including the labor of the Christian man, in an attempt to save himself or to stay in God’s favor by keeping the commandments.

Labor!

There is no rest for man in his labor.

Labor! Labor!

The whole world of man labors under this bondage to save himself. There is no hope in the labor of man. There is no spiritual rest for man in his labor.

Labor! Labor! Labor!

Labor is all man can do. But man cannot enter the rest with his labor. There is no sabbath rest for man. A man will labor six days and never enter the seventh day of sabbath rest. Indeed, man cannot enter the rest. There is only bondage left for man. Man is full of unrest. All of his laboring serves sin, Satan, the world, and man’s

6 Herman Hoeksema, “The Sabbath Rest,” sermon on Lord’s Day 38, preached December 18, 1960, https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=heidelberg-catechism-sermons.

7 Hoeksema, “The Sabbath Rest.”

8 Hoeksema, “The Sabbath Rest.”

own sinful flesh. It is the labor of vanity. It is the labor of antichrist.

The world of man can only follow the six and never, never reach the seven. Labor, labor and toil and toil and sorrow without rest. That is the man of sin—666—labor without rest. The week without the sabbath that is characteristic of the whole world. Because the sabbath is lost.⁹

Herman Hoeksema aptly summarized the labor of man for salvation in *Reformed Dogmatics*, and I quote at length:

That the number 666 has a symbolic meaning is even more to be expected because it occurs in the book of Revelation. If we apply the rule that most aspects of Revelation are symbolic, we find that six is the number of the earthly creation with a view to time. Four is the number of the earth with a view to its extent or scope. Scripture speaks of the four winds and of the four corners of the earth. Six is the number of the earth and of all earthly things from the viewpoint of their development in time. It is the number of creation week. It is the number of our week of toil and labor without the sabbath. It clearly represents the idea of labor without rest, of effort that is not crowned, of exertion that ends in ultimate failure, of time without eternity. It is the number of vanity of vanities: it is all vanity. The number six, therefore, stands for all the efforts of man in time to find rest in earthly things.

That the number six is repeated three times and multiplied by ten and ten times ten indicates the completeness of man's effort to bring the things of this world to their highest possible development, for the number ten always indicates a fullness. The number's repetition and multiplication also indicate that man strives repeatedly in the course of history to reach the rest, to establish the ideal situation in the kingdom of man. But repeatedly he fails, for he is mere man. The number of man is always six. To the number seven, the final sabbath, the true rest, he never attains. Antichrist is from below. His efforts are always limited by the number six and are therefore doomed to fail.¹⁰

Here in this quote is the explanation of the organic development of sin by man in this world to its final

culmination in the man of sin. We do not enter into the rest of God's fellowship by the keeping of the law with our efforts (responsibilities), which are determined by the commandments, as Van Overloop taught. Man is a slave to sin, and he serves sin in everything he does. Vanity of vanities. The labor of man is the building of the kingdom of antichrist, from which we as elect children of the promise have been freed. We do not work side by side with God, by grace, to enter into the rest. No! That is only more bondage.

Our works can never be the means that God uses to bring us into the rest because even our best works are imperfect. Our God is a just God, who demands perfect obedience—the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. Teaching works as the *means* to enter the rest is a corruption of God's justice. We reject the error of those

who teach that the new covenant of grace, which God the Father, through the mediation of the death of Christ, made with man, does not herein consist that we by faith, inasmuch as it accepts the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved, but in the fact that God, having revoked the demand of perfect obedience of the law, regards faith itself and the obedience of faith, although imperfect, as the perfect obedience of the law, and does esteem it worthy of the reward of eternal life through grace.

Rejection: For these contradict the Scriptures: *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood* (Rom. 3:24, 25). And these proclaim, as did the wicked Socinus, a new and strange justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church. (Canons of Dordt 2, error and rejection 4, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 165)

We reject the error of those

who teach that the perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election, or a gift of God gained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which (as they declare) man before his decisive election and justification must fulfill through his free will.

Rejection: For the Holy Scripture testifies that this follows out of election, and is given the elect in virtue of the death, the resurrection, and intercession of Christ: *But the elect obtained it and the rest were hardened* (Rom. 11:7). Likewise: *He that*

9 Hoeksema, "The Sabbath Rest."

10 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:548.

*spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom. 8:32–35). (Canons of Dordt 5, error and rejection 1, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 176)*

How then do we enter into the rest of God? In other words, how do we enter into perfect fellowship with the holy God?

Christ's own words in John 14:6: "I am the way [to God the Father, to fellowship with God, and to everlasting glory], the truth, and the life [and you and your obedience are not the way]."

Our salvation is wholly by promise (Christ), by God's revealing himself and not by man's labor. "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Heb. 4:10). Glory be God!

God spoke to Moses by promise in the tabernacle when Israel was at Mount Sinai: "My presence shall go with thee, and *I will give thee rest*" (Ex. 33:14, emphasis added). All the while Joshua observed God speaking "unto his friend" Moses (v. 11). God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (v. 19). As a type of Christ, Joshua pointed to the way of rest, Christ. God led his people into the rest through Christ. The Israelites were given faith, and they entered into the rest of God by that free gift of election. The covenant blessings are by promise. Entering into rest is by Christ.

God through Jesus Christ entered into the kingdom of unrest, taking on himself the curse by taking on our sinful flesh, perfectly doing the will of God and meriting rest for his elect. Jesus Christ labored to enter the rest, and in perfect rest he labored, and he gives his rest as a free and sovereign gift of election by grace through faith. The labor of Hebrews 4:11 is the labor of faith! Faith enters into the rest (vv. 2–3) because faith clings to Christ, his work, and his merits. Faith is the engrafting into the body of the perfect mediator, who took on our curse and unrest. Unbelief does not enter in; reprobate man does not enter in. Is not that what is being made plain in all of Hebrews 4? Hebrews 3:18–19 explain to the Jews of the day that the reprobate Israelites fell in the wilderness and did not enter into the promised land, and this was shown by their unbelief. Man cannot enter into the rest except by faith—not by man's obedience,

nor by man's act of believing! The fact that a man enters into rest is explained by the free election of the sovereign God. This explains how filthy sinners enter into perfect, covenant fellowship with the holy God. They are cleansed in the blood of Christ, eternally, as a free and sovereign choice by the holy God. Not by works! Our works, even our best works, are all filthy and are covered by the blood of the eternal Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Our works are fruits and only fruits. We do good works *because* we were brought into the rest (covenant fellowship), and good works are never the way, the means, or mixed with faith unto that covenant fellowship (salvation).

We believe that our salvation consists in the remission of our sins for Jesus Christ's sake, and that therein our righteousness before God is implied: as David and Paul teach us, declaring this to be the happiness of man, that God imputes righteousness to him without works. And the same apostle saith that we are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ.

And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before Him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror and dread. (Belgic Confession 23, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 51–52)

We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, doth regenerate and make him a new man, causing him to live a new life, and freeing him from the bondage of sin...

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...*

Moreover, though we do good works, we do not found our salvation upon them... Thus, then, we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences continually vexed, if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior. (Belgic Confession 24, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 52–55)

Hear from Hoeksema again,

God enters into his rest. And he does that, beloved, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, God enters into his rest. That is the sabbath. For Christ came, beloved; and Christ is God himself, God in the flesh. And he came to us and entered into our unrest. God did, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We were in unrest. Christ took our unrest upon his mighty shoulders. He did that when he became flesh. Christmas, beloved, Christmas. There Christ came under the law and under the curse, and he took the law and the curse upon himself. And with that law and the curse upon his mighty shoulders, he walked the way of perfect obedience unto the Father. He entered into our curse; and bearing the curse, he entered into our death.

Oh, God in Jesus Christ labored and toiled as no man ever saw anyone toil before. God revealed our toil in Jesus Christ, our Lord. So he toiled and labored, that in Gethsemane he crawled as a worm and no man. And on the cross he finally cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Christ in our unrest, under our toil, under our curse.

And he entered into his rest. When the labor was finished, Christ entered into his rest. God entered into the rest through Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the resurrection...In the resurrection day when Christ arose from the dead, Christ and God through him, who raised Christ from the dead, entered into the rest, that is, the perfect peace, the perfect covenant, the perfect fellowship, the perfect heavenly covenant, the tabernacle of God with man. Christ did...

Therefore Christ...after he entered through death and through the grave into his rest...said to us and...says to us now, “Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest”—rest—sabbatic rest. For, beloved, Christ entered into his rest at the head of his people, at the head of his whole church. He did not enter into his rest for his own sake, but as he took our sins and our iniquities upon himself, as he took our unrest upon himself, so he entered with our unrest into his rest, so that our sins and iniquities and the curse of God upon him and therefore upon his church are no more. They are gone, forevermore gone! And therefore, Christ can say to us, at the head of his people, at the head of his church, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest. It is finished.”

And, beloved, now we enter into the rest of God only by faith. Don't you see? That is faith. Faith is not work. Faith is exactly the opposite of work. Faith is the confidence and the knowledge that the work is finished. It is finished. As Christ said on the cross, “It is finished”; and as God testified in his resurrection, “It is finished, completely finished,” so we by faith enter into a perfectly finished work. That is our sabbath. The work is finished. We don't have to work. We cannot work. The work is completed, and by faith we enter into the finished work of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And that finished work is the perfection of the covenant of God, so that now we enter into God's fellowship, not at the end of six days of labor but at the beginning. We rest first, and then we labor. Not the week is first, and the sabbath follows; but the sabbath is first, and the week follows. Not labor, that is, not labor until the work is finished but labor by faith, labor by faith, to enter into rest that is already finished.¹¹

Today, according to God's sovereign counsel, we live with a totally depraved flesh full of unrest in a world of unrest. We lie in the midst of death, and death is unrest. Our doubts and fears are born of the infirmity of that sinful flesh. Do you not feel that? Over against this infirmity is the reality that Christ gives us rest (covenant fellowship) as a free gift by the preaching of the gospel. The rest that we have in principle now is seated in our hearts by faith through the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of heaven has come. That rest is sure, the final rest of heaven. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). The rest of heaven is ours. And we have the surety of it already now by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of heaven seated in our hearts. Is this truth not freeing? Live in that freedom. Joy in the rest of the sure and total victory; labor by faith to enter into the rest!

If you are interested in listening to Herman Hoeksema's sermon on Lord's Day 38, please scan the QR code below.



—Jeremy Langerak

¹¹ Hoeksema, “The Sabbath Rest.”



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

FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. — Matthew 27:18

A curious note by the Holy Spirit regarding the trial of the Christ, our Lord. Pilate knew that for envy the Jews had delivered Christ. That shrewd politician, who had navigated the dangerous world of Roman politics to emerge as a favorite of the emperor and thus the emperor's appointee to the land of Palestine, knew about envy. Pilate knew that envy burned deep in the human breast. He knew that envy plotted and planned all the while envy smiled at the object of its smoldering hatred. He knew that envy murdered rivals to step over their dead bodies and come out on top. And Pilate knew that those church politicians had delivered Christ because they envied him.

Envy is a form of hatred. As hatred, envy is murderous. Envy does not shrink from murder. Envy does not shrink from the murder of God. The specific elements of envy in the pantheon of hatred are jealousy and rivalry. The result of envy is strife and death. Envy will remove the hated rival!

The Jews hated Christ because they were jealous of him. They were jealous of his power, his gifts, his words, and the place that God had given to Christ in the church as head and sole Lord, savior, bishop, apostle, prophet, priest, and king. They would not be nothing besides Christ, and they would not be his servants. They would have their works and not his alone! Thus the Jews were also Christ's rivals, for they had designs on God's vineyard.

There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. (Matt. 21:33–39, 45)

Then what Christ had prophesied of those Jews came to pass. With their murderous envy, they delivered Jesus Christ to Pilate to be crucified because they would seize the vineyard for themselves.

So it always is in the history of the church. Christ is placed on trial because the wicked husbandmen envy him. They hate Christ's claim that he is the only savior, that he is the light of the world, the door of the sheep, the way, the truth, and the life. They hate Christ's dominion in his church by his Spirit and word. They hate that he alone is salvation. And they have designs on the Lord's heritage. And for envy they deliver up Christ. Oh, yes, now, of course, they do it in many backhanded and covert ways. Often they kill Christ by killing one of his servants or casting out his truth. But the effect is the same. They crucify Christ. "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (Prov. 27:4). They crucified Christ. They cursed him. And they buried him.

Christ rose again! He always does. When he is crucified and buried in one church, then he arises in another! And when he is risen, he draws his own unto himself!

—NJL