

The background features a stylized, orange-toned illustration. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. A shield is positioned in the lower left, partially overlapping the sword's hilt. The shield is decorated with several circular patterns. The overall style is clean and modern, using a monochromatic orange color scheme.

SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



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PIERCED

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced. — John 19:31–37

The Jews *therefore* did this. “Therefore” is the correct translation. The word “therefore” is a divine therefore. The Jews did this under the power and sovereign control of God, who controls the wicked hearts of men in order that all his good pleasure be done. God carries out his own word. He had spoken of this moment earlier. Long before this event took place, God had declared that it would take place. The cross is God’s word. God brought that cross to pass according to his divine word and made that cross happen exactly as he had determined and for his glorious purpose.

Regarding all the details of the cross of Christ, the Jews did with their wicked hands whatsoever God determined before to be done and which he sovereignly controlled with his hand so that it was done in order to establish and bring about and fulfill his word of truth. As with the detail of Jesus’ piercing, God controlled all the details of the cross.

The Jews were instruments in God’s hands. Wicked. Oh, yes, wicked indeed, but under the sovereign control of the almighty God. *Therefore*, according to the divine counsel and decree, there was one more act of violence—one more act of malice and one more show of contempt—that had to be perpetrated at the cross against the Lord’s anointed.

In a piece of vile hypocrisy, the religious leaders of that day scrupled over the sabbath day. We read, “The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.” Jesus was dead. The soldiers saw that. They had achieved their end. The thieves the soldiers cared nothing about. The Jews wanted the bodies disposed of and the

crosses taken down. The reason was that the Sabbath was near, and they did not want the Sabbath defiled by bodies hanging on the trees all night.

After all, Moses had said,

22. And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:
23. His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance. (Deut. 21:22–23)

That sabbath day especially was a high day, which the Jews did not want to defile.

That pretended sanctity of hypocrites was an abomination that the Spirit exposed. He hated the Jews’ religion and held it up for scorn. It is characteristic of hypocrisy that it passes light over monstrous wickedness and scruples about a detail. So the Jews breezed over their monstrous hatred, envy, and desire of revenge, out of which they had murdered an innocent man. They gave no further thought to the wickedness in which they had killed a prophet, a teacher of truth, the Lord of glory, and the savior of Israel. But the Jews were very concerned that the Sabbath be not defiled. It is true that the law said that a body might not remain on the tree all night. But the Jews were concerned about keeping the Sabbath holy, after they had murdered their neighbor, as though God is pleased by a trifle while the second great commandment of the law is transgressed.

Such fools men become in their doctrine of works-righteousness. They are much concerned about

the outward keeping of the law, all the while they are ignorant that the law reveals all their sins and that salvation by the law is impossible. The Jews were much concerned with the Sabbath and the outward rest, and they had just murdered the only one who is rest. So foolish is that zeal that goes about to establish its own righteousness, while being ignorant of the righteousness of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Being ignorant of that cross and unbelieving in the face of that cross, it is characteristic of unbelief that it stumbles over the cross of Christ, is offended by the cross of Christ, and will have that cross of Christ removed from its midst as a cause of great wickedness in the land.

So the gospel of Christ has always been slandered. The gospel has been slandered as the cause of evil and defilement in the land. The people must have the law, not the cross. The law will make people righteous, and the law will make the land holy. But such subservience to the law is the result of unbelief in the cross of Christ and offense at the cross of Christ as the only ground and foundation of salvation and offense that desires the cross to be removed and calls the cross the reason for the defilement of the whole land.

In their hypocrisy, ignorance, and unbelief, the Jews asked that Pilate break the legs of the crucified to hasten their deaths. But Christ had died already. So a soldier pierced Christ with a spear.

Pierced!

The events of our text took place after the death of Jesus.

The King James Version translates that the Jews “therefore” did what they did. The word “therefore” connects our text with the preceding context, which says that Christ had taken the last of the vinegar to his lips. Then with a shout that shook hell and all the forces of evil and darkness to their core, Jesus declared, “It is finished!” He brought to their goal and fulfilled all of God’s promises. Jesus accomplished all of God’s will and purpose for salvation. Jesus Christ did it.

The Jews had hated and plotted. The Jews had paid and betrayed. Then was the hour of darkness, the time for the prince of this world to do his long-planned deed to snuff out the life of Christ. So they came with the band of soldiers, vagabonds, and ruffians and laid hold on Jesus as on a common thief. The Jews tried Jesus first before the Sanhedrin and observed all the outward commands of the law. That is also characteristic of hypocrisy

and unbelief. Hypocrisy and unbelief make sure that everything has the appearance of right. The laws and the way things should be done are most important to unbelief and hypocrisy, but they neglect the weightier matters of the law, such as justice and mercy. So the chief priests, the elders, and all the council diligently sought two false witnesses whom the leaders of the Jews suborned to tell lies about Christ. But the witnesses could not agree. The leaders of the Jews solemnly put Jesus under oath according to the law but only to carry out their malicious purposes to kill him, since he had confessed and denied not that he was the Christ.

The chief priests and elders brought Jesus to Pilate and studiously avoided defiling themselves outwardly by entering the judgment hall, lest they would be unable to keep the passover, all the while they sought the life of their neighbor. They had a law, a law according to which that man had to die because he made himself the Son of God. Even Pilate trembled. Madly, the Jews pressed on.

“Crucify him, crucify him!”

“Would you rather have Jesus or Barabbas?”

“We will have Barabbas, a murderer and brigand, instead of Christ!” Suddenly, the Jews became very patriotic as well. “We have no king but Caesar! If you let this man go, you are not Caesar’s friend because he made himself a king!”

Even Pilate trembled: “Are you a king then?”

“Ah, yes, a king indeed, but my kingdom is not of this world; yet it is a kingdom that controls all others, for even you, Pilate, could have no power, except it were given to you from above.”

Madly, the Jews pressed on.

“Crucify him, crucify him!”

Having vainly washed his hands, Pilate gave the orders to crucify Jesus. Jesus became the plaything of the soldiers, who made up a little game with an old purple robe, a reed, and a crown of thorns to amuse themselves and to mock and smite Jesus. Then they led him away to be crucified. There at Golgotha they nailed Jesus to his cross and two thieves with him, and Jesus in the midst. In his last dig at the Jews, Pilate placed a mocking superscription above Christ’s head: **THE KING OF THE JEWS!** The soldiers played a game of dice for Jesus’ clothes. The crowds made him the butt of their sneering. Some passed by with better things to do than cast even a sideways glance at the dying Christ. The world was plunged into darkness. For three hours—away from the prying eyes of wicked men and the mocking voices of unbelieving

So foolish is that zeal that goes about to establish its own righteousness, while being ignorant of the righteousness of the cross of Jesus Christ.

men—in the darkness God poured out his wrath upon his Son and forsook him there at the cross. And having done all that had to be done, Jesus cried out, “I thirst!” Thirsty from the labors and exertions of accomplishing salvation. With that last bitter draft burning his cracked lips and parched throat, Jesus declared that all was done that God had willed to be done: “It is finished!” And Jesus gave up the ghost.

The Jews, therefore...!

The reason for them was that the Sabbath was nigh. So they besought Pilate that the legs of the crucified be broken. The legs of a crucified one were smashed with a club so that he could no longer support his weight and suffocated. Pilate catered to the Jews and ordered the *crurifragium*. The soldiers came to the first thief and broke his legs. They came to the second thief and broke his legs. But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he had died already. They did not break his legs, but one of the soldiers took his spear and thrust it into Jesus’ side.

Pierced!

That last act of malice against a person whom you have thoroughly destroyed. It is the kick when you are already down. It is that final stab with your words against someone whom you have already demolished. It is senseless and unnecessary and full of devilish malice. The soldiers saw that Jesus had died already. He had given up the ghost. The soldiers had seen Jesus give up the ghost. They had heard him declare two things: “It is finished,” and but a moment later, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” They had seen Jesus bow his head. They had watched as the Son of God passed from life to death. His limp body hung on the cross, torn and lifeless. Because he had died already, the soldiers did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers could not resist a final jab into the side of this KING OF THE JEWS.

And from his wound flowed blood and water, not blood only but blood and water.

John saw it. All throughout the events of the crucifixion, the disciple whom Jesus loved beheld those things. John was an eyewitness of those things. He had received from Jesus the word concerning his mother, and from then on she was in John’s care. Then he saw Christ pierced. And of those things, John gave solemn testimony that they are true.

John was not mistaken in what he saw. He was not mistaken in his testimony. He did not make those things up. He was not telling a good story. He was not elaborating or adding things for effect. He saw, and his witness is true. He knew that what he said is true.

Those who were involved in Christ’s crucifixion had done many things to him. Then also those things were done: the soldiers did not break his legs because Jesus had

died already; a soldier pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, and out of his side immediately came blood and water.

John spoke the truth!

He meant, first, that those things really happened to Christ and that John had faithfully related the events.

John meant, second, that those things were the revelation of the truth of Christ’s death, the real reality of his death, and the meaning and purpose of his death.

A soldier pierced Jesus in malice.

God pierced Jesus for a sign.

For those things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled.

The soldiers did not break Jesus’ legs because the scripture should be fulfilled, which said, “A bone of him shall not be broken.” The reference is to a small detail in the law of Moses about the passover lamb. The lamb that brought salvation to the Israelites in the land of Egypt and was the ground and power of their deliverance from Egypt had to be eaten whole. Not a bone of that lamb could be broken. So said the law in Exodus 12:46: “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof.” So also Moses commanded in Numbers 9:12: “Ye shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it.”

And a soldier pierced Jesus’ side because the scripture said, “They shall look on him whom they pierced.” So God had spoken by the prophet Zechariah in Zechariah 12:10: “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

Those things were done in order that the scripture should be fulfilled.

So those things are the word of God. The cross—all the events of the cross, everything that happened at the cross—is the word of God. In the beginning the word of God made all things. The word of God brought all things into existence and gave all things their beings and shapes and offices. So the word of God, the living and abiding word of God, brought the cross into existence and brought every detail of that cross to pass. God said, “Let there be a cross.” And God said about every detail of that cross, “Let it be.” And it was. Because the cross is the word of God, and every detail is God’s work, therefore, Jesus said, “It is finished.”

Therefore those things happened in order that the scripture should be fulfilled. The explanation of those things is not merely the hypocrisy and hatred of the Jews or the gratuitous violence of the Roman soldier, but the explanation is God and the word of God who said, “Let the cross be.”

And more specifically that word of God was the promise of salvation. God spoke those little details about the passover lamb, “A bone of him shall not be broken,” as a promise concerning Christ. It was a solemn oath and testimony of God: “A bone of him shall not be broken!” That is a promise. And again, God spoke a promise in that detail of Christ’s death, “They shall look on him whom they pierced.”

They shall! Promise!

And God fulfilled that promise. Those things happened so that every promise of God be yes and amen in Jesus Christ. If God fulfilled those miniscule details regarding the cross of Christ, every promise of God concerning salvation and his covenant of grace was fulfilled at the cross of Christ. All God’s promises are yes and amen in Christ.

And of that reality, that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ, God gave a sure and certain sign: when the soldier pierced Jesus, out came blood and water.

Because not a bone of his was broken, Jesus Christ is the true passover lamb of God. He is the one whom all of those Old Testament passover lambs figured. That was spoken of Christ—not of the mere lambs that Israel ate—but of Christ. And so when the soldiers did not break Jesus’ legs, and God says that fulfilled his word about the lamb, then God declares Christ to be the true passover lamb. He is the lamb of God. Christ our pass-over was sacrificed for us.

And when the soldier pierced Jesus, it became clear who Jesus was. God! God speaks in Zechariah 12:10: “They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced” (emphasis added). The one whom they pierced is God in human flesh.

And because he is the lamb of God and because he is God in the flesh crucified for us, his death is satisfaction. When the soldier pierced Jesus with the spear, that fact became perfectly plain to anyone with eyes to see because out of him came blood and water.

By water and blood is meant the whole perfection of righteousness and holiness. All that is necessary for redemption, satisfaction, righteousness, holiness—in short, for perfect salvation—is found in Christ. All things are cleansed in the law by blood. Blood is the cleansing power. And the cleansing power of blood is made plain by the water that accompanied that blood.

Blood and water came out of Jesus by the wonder of

Blood and water came out of Jesus by the wonder of God’s grace so that we may know that in Jesus Christ alone is found all that is necessary for our salvation.

God’s grace so that we may know that in Jesus Christ alone is found all that is necessary for our salvation, that perfect cleansing from all sin and the right to eternal life.

Blood, because Jesus Christ made the full and complete satisfaction for sin that delivers us from our pharaoh, who is the devil, and delivers us into the spiritual land of Canaan. Jesus Christ is the true pass-over lamb.

Water, because when the blood of Christ is applied to us, it cleanses us from all sin. That blood when applied to us washes us as water washes away the filth of the body; so Christ’s blood is the only power that is able to wash away our sins. He fully accomplished our salvation.

He washes us from the guilt of sin, from that sense of impending doom and judgment from God, which is ours on account of our transgressions, whether committed before or after believing, whether original or actual. All our guilt is washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. He alone is our propitiation. And he fulfilled the whole law of God and fulfilled all righteousness for us.

He is our righteousness!

He washes away the pollution, dominion, and shame of sin. His blood cleanses us from the filthiness of sin. His blood sets us free from the dominion

of sin, and his blood takes away all the shame of sin.

He is our sanctification!

To be washed in his blood is salvation, full and free.

So that we might believe, John recorded what he had witnessed and testified that it is true.

Regardless of the reason men did what they did, God determined it, God spoke of it beforehand, God controlled those events, and God had them recorded so that you might believe.

The purpose is to give a testimony—a solemn eyewitness testimony—of the value of the sacrifice of Christ, so that you and I might believe in him and his cross as the only ground and foundation of our salvation.

When John said, “That ye might believe,” he meant a real apprehension of Christ as the fulfillment of the whole law and the Lord in whom is found perfect satisfaction for sin and perfect cleansing from sin.

This we receive by faith.

John witnessed and solemnly testified of this fact, that out of Jesus’ wound came blood and water, so that you might believe.

That you might believe because faith in the cleansing blood of Christ is the only instrument by which the power of Christ's blood is applied to you. Do nothing but believe! John's witness is true!

Believe because faith is not working for salvation. By faith we are united to Christ, and by faith all that is his becomes ours. By faith we rest and rely on Christ alone and him crucified for salvation. That is faith's very nature. Faith will not do for salvation, but faith will only rest and rely on Christ.

That you might believe this sign: when Jesus was pierced, out of his side came blood and water. That you might believe that, John testified of it. That our faith might rest for salvation on nothing and on no one but Christ Jesus and him crucified.

Whoever believes has the same assurance as John mentioned: he knows that these things are true. John knew because he saw. Faith knows because faith brings with it the Spirit's testimony of the truth of Christ's death. The Spirit's witness is indubitable. He confirms true believers in the truth of Christ so that their faith might rest in him alone and not vacillate. No matter the greatness of sin, Jesus Christ is salvation to everyone who believes in him.

Either Jesus Christ is salvation to everyone who believes in him, or John is a liar. So is every faithful minister of the gospel now and throughout history. So is every true church of Jesus Christ now and throughout history. If out of the pierced side of the one whose legs the soldiers did not break came not blood and water, if those things are not true, then God, most of all, is a liar. If that blood and water did not signify full salvation to everyone who believes in Christ, and only to those who believe in Christ, then God is a liar.

Either Christ Jesus is the only way of salvation to everyone who believes; either righteousness is to him who works not but believes that God justifies the ungodly; either salvation is not of him who wills nor of him who runs but of God who shows mercy; either Christ is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; either all of our salvation is found in Christ

Jesus alone and is received from him by faith alone without works; either salvation is all of God's sovereign and particular grace; either one glories in the cross of Christ alone for salvation; either God is first and man never is first; either your works—also your repentance—are not the way to forgiveness; either faith is not your doing for salvation; either these things are true or Christianity is the greatest hoax that has ever been perpetrated upon the human race.

Those are the options. God is true. Or God is a liar. God is all true in all that he says, and we must believe his word and depend on it for time and eternity alone, or God is a liar.

Understand that is always what is at stake when the truth is at stake. That is what is at stake in every controversy throughout history over the truth of the word of God. God is true and his word is true and his promise is true and all is fulfilled in Christ, or God is liar. And one cannot depart from the truth of God's word one iota without trampling the whole thing underfoot and tearing the whole thing to shreds. It is always this: Is man and are all men liars, or is God a liar?

There are many things about which men may disagree, but the truth of God is not one of them. What that truth is is not a matter of interpretation; it is not a matter of words; it is not a matter of perspective; it is not a matter of intention or situation. The truth of God is a matter of faith. One either believes it, or one says that God is a liar. When the truth is at stake, this then is the issue: Is man and are all men liars, or is God a liar?

For God testified concerning his Son and his cross. God brought forward his eyewitness. The eyewitness recorded all those events of the cross. He set them down to testify that they are true. Christ is the true passover. He is the only ground and foundation of salvation. Either all of our salvation is found in Christ and we receive this from Christ by faith alone, or God is a liar. When the soldier pierced Jesus, John solemnly testified to you that out of Jesus' side came blood and water. Believe that testimony unto your salvation.

—NJL

Readers, remember to keep your submissions coming! Our eagle-eyed and sharp-eared readers continue to send in interesting and edifying material. We try to publish that as soon as space in our usually full magazine allows. We believe that readers' contributions are an important part of our magazine. And we want the believer, whose paper it is, to have a voice in the paper through material that he or she finds important to publish. *Sword and Shield* is a believer's paper, and we hope that with this issue, as with every issue, that the truly Reformed believer is informed and edified, being built up and established in the true doctrine, and that the believer is armed to contend against the lie.

We have informative and insightful contributions from a member of Cornerstone Reformed Protestant Church, Karissa Crich. Reverend Bomers continues his analysis of what happened in Zion, the now-disbanded Reformed Protestant congregation in southern California. It seems that there were many who came to the Reformed Protestant denomination who wanted something other than the gospel of Jesus Christ and its calling that Israel shall dwell in safety alone. Our *Running Footmen* rubric is filled in this issue by Braylon Mingerink, a member of First Reformed Protestant Church and a student at Grace Reformed Protestant School. It is very encouraging to see the zeal for the truth in the young men and women of the churches, and Braylon shows that zeal for the truth in his article. The rest of the crew you are familiar with.

Sword and Shield is now approaching its third anniversary.

We have seen much fruit on this labor that the Lord has begun and which he continues to prosper. *Sword and Shield* was forged in the furnace of doctrinal controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches over the issue of whether there is that which man must do to experience and possess his salvation: Is man, with his Spirit-wrought works, first, so that God may not and will not bless unless and until man first acts? The Protestant Reformed denomination has succumbed to the deadly lie that there *is* that which man must do to be saved. The doctrinal division and hatred for the truth that was exposed in the Protestant Reformed Churches by the appearance of *Sword and Shield* have only grown.

The editorial this month answers the Protestant Reformed lie as it was put forward again in a recent speech by Prof. David Engelsma. He has shown himself to be an enemy of the reformation that gave rise to the Reformed Protestant Churches and a leader in the public opposition to the doctrine of the Reformed Protestant Churches. His recent speech shows nothing different. In that speech he shows that there is a massive and widening gulf between the Protestant Reformed corruption of the gospel and the Reformed Protestant truth that a man is justified by faith alone without works. We continue to be thankful for such speeches that confirm us in the truth that reformation was absolutely necessary. We also give thanks to God that he has delivered us from such doctrinal rot that destroys consciences and souls and that he gives us a platform to combat those lies.

—NJL

DELUSION

That None Turn

A delusion is a lie. A delusion is, in fact, a deception. A delusion is a fixed, even stubborn, false opinion and belief about objective things. Delusions lead astray; and like all species of the lie, delusions lead to destruction. A delusion in life is serious. A man might have delusions about his own abilities, and so like

Icarus he soars where he does not belong. A delusion in doctrine is eternally serious. So the apostle Paul says, "For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:11–12). The thing about delusions, according to this text, is that God sends them. The result

of the delusion that God sends is that the people believe a lie. The reason that God sends the delusion is his sovereign purpose of reprobation that many be damned because he did not will their salvation, but he willed their damnation. Their damnation is on account of their unbelief and their pleasure in unrighteousness.

Part of the strong delusion that the Lord has sent to the Protestant Reformed Churches involves the doctrine of repentance and forgiveness. Stubbornly, tenaciously, with malice, the denomination clings to her delusion that there is that which man must do to be saved.

One of the chief purveyors of the delusion is Prof. David Engelsma. On February 14, 2024, he gave a speech concerning the relationship of repentance and forgiveness, a transcript of which was spread around by email.¹ A copy of the text of the speech came across my desk, and I read the speech with interest. I note that my copy is dated February 14, 2014, and that Engelsma said, “The doctrine of the PRC concerning repentance and forgiveness in AD 2014 is the same as it has always been,” which are obvious errors, since the speech was recently given and mentions recent events. With every piece of writing that Professor Engelsma produces on the doctrinal divide between the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), he strengthens the hands of the wicked, so that they do not repent. So Jeremiah prophesied of these days: “I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah” (Jer. 23:14).

According to the text in Jeremiah, all of Professor Engelsma’s professed interest in the doctrine of repentance is vain. Because his doctrine of repentance is wrong, it does not lead to repentance, but it leads to impenitence. There is a doctrinal side to that impenitence. None in the Protestant Reformed Churches will turn from their wicked, man-glorifying, and God-dishonoring doctrine precisely because of men like Professor Engelsma and precisely because of his speeches and writings on the subject. There is also a very practical effect to this impenitence: his doctrine does not lead to true repentance. For years while I was a minister in the PRC, I grieved over this fact. When dealing in consistory with pastoral and discipline cases and when dealing in the broader church with such cases, it was nearly impossible to get elders and members to see what true repentance is. What was in vogue and what is still in vogue in the PRC is what I call “I’m sorry” repentance. It is repentance that is as false as it is superficial. In

short, it is not true repentance at all but the repentance of the world that works death. I lay that view of repentance at the feet of Professor Engelsma’s doctrine. He does not, in fact, teach true repentance at all, but he teaches a repentance that hypocrites have and do easily mimic. What is missing in Engelsma’s doctrine of repentance is evidence.

The Reformed Form for Excommunication speaks of real repentance:

We cannot conceal from you, with great sorrow, that no one has yet appeared before us who hath in the least given us to understand that he...is come to any remorse for his sins, or hath shown the least token of true repentance. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 276)

The same thought is contained in the Church Order. Article 75 says that reconciliation shall take place “upon sufficient evidence of repentance,” and article 76 speaks of those who show “no signs of repentance” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 401). Repentance is itself not a way but an evidence, and thus repentance also has clear and unmistakable evidence. Repentance is not a one-to-one activity with sin, so that with every sin there is repentance—an “I’m sorry”—and then forgiveness. Repentance is a way of life that evidences the true faith out of which repentance comes.

Professor Engelsma does not believe that repentance is an evidence, and he does not teach that repentance has any real evidence. But for Professor Engelsma repentance is a one-to-one correspondence with sin. One sin. One repentance. One forgiveness. He teaches at best a superficial sorrow of the world. And that does not lead to true repentance in the churches; but as the apostle says, it leads to death: “Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:10).

Yes, for years in the PRC this worldly sorrow has been accepted as true sorrow, and the fault is in the PRC’s doctrine of repentance. Husbands beat their wives and got away with a superficial “I’m sorry.” Men raped children and were received into the communion of the church after a few tears and some expressions of regret. Men were serial adulterers, and an empty show of contrition swayed consistories that the men were repentant. This is not hyperbole. These are facts. I can produce the details to establish the facts if necessary. The PRC, like Rome, has no business lecturing anyone on repentance. The practical fruit of all the Protestant Reformed ministers’ and professors’ repentance preaching and their repentance doctrine

¹ David J. Engelsma, “Text of the Instruction of the Reformed Doctrines Class concerning the Relation of Repentance and Forgiveness (February 14, 2014).” Professor Engelsma requested Monica Koole to distribute the document to “all the members of the RD Class” and also “to whom-ever you please.” A copy can be obtained from Monica at monica@kleyelectric.com. Quotations from the speech are taken from this document.

is not repentance, but the fruit is the deadly sorrow of the world that takes the form of “I’m sorry” repentance.

The PRC’s doctrine of repentance cannot lead to true repentance because that doctrine is as false as it is superficial. And I say that Professor Engelsma bears blame in this matter, for it is his doctrine that now reigns in the PRC. In the recent controversy with the RPC, he has shown the way for the PRC. He gripes from time to time that no one listens to him, but the people are listening. And it is amazing that he will produce a letter or a speech, and soon afterward his talking points are heard from the pulpits. He still is the PRC’s theologian. And his doctrine of repentance is the PRC’s doctrine, although there is evidence from the writings of his colleagues that they are moving past him and intend eventually to leave him in the dust.

The Reformed Protestant Churches supposedly cannot and do not preach repentance properly, if the ministers preach repentance at all. The RPC cannot teach about repentance properly because she does not teach the proper relationship between repentance and forgiveness. The proper preaching of repentance is supposedly that one repents in order to be forgiven. Repentance cannot be taught any other way, the PRC says, without fundamentally corrupting the idea of repentance itself, corrupting the idea of forgiveness, doing despite to God’s way of salvation, making men careless and profane, and imperiling souls now and forever. The RPC strengthens the hands of the wicked, so that they do not repent.

In the PRC this idea that you repent in order to be forgiven is phrased in many different ways. You repent for forgiveness. You repent unto your forgiveness. You repent first, and then and only then can God forgive you. You repent, and God may forgive you. You turn and draw near to God first in repentance, and then God will return and draw near to you with forgiveness. All these things that you do first are gifts, of course, and so this apparently saves repentance from being termed a *condition*. And this all is supposed to mean that forgiveness comes and only comes in the way of repentance. In the way of repentance, God forgives the sinner.

This is supposed to be so obvious that those who deny it are stupid and dense; they deny the Reformed, the Protestant, and the Christian faith; and they deny what Peter, Paul, Jesus, and all the patriarchs and prophets of both the Old and New Testaments taught. So then the ministers and members of the Reformed Protestant Churches in their teaching of repentance are radical and idiosyncratic crackpots, who are not only schismatics, but they also endanger souls and salvation by their evil doctrine.

And tellingly, the PRC adds that if the Reformed Protestant doctrine is correct, then there is no reason for the sinner to repent. If the sinner does not repent in order to

be forgiven—and let me phrase that another way: if the sinner does not get something for his repentance—then there is no reason for the sinner to repent.

Professor Engelsma with his speech yet again lends his voice to this chorus that has been singing the same tune accompanied by the same one-string fiddle for a number of years now. In his speech Professor Engelsma does not add anything new to the debate. But if one repeats a lie enough times, it becomes truth; and every good propagandist knows this. Professor Engelsma’s speech is not about doing theology, but the speech is about propaganda. In fact, if one takes out all of his empty rhetoric, there is not much left to the speech. He does not, in fact, do much theology. He certainly does not interact with his opponents in any meaningful way, but he caricatures their position, sets up a straw man, and knocks it down. This is an old and favorite tactic of the PRC against the Reformed Protestants.

Beginning with Lies

But the speech aims to delude and is the product of a delusion.

First, Engelsma begins with the delusion that the subject of his speech, the relationship between repentance and forgiveness, “was not the cause of the schism.” Indeed, he maintains that the cause of the schism was “not doctrinal.” He must be off his rocker, which I want to hope for his sake is true. But I do not believe that he is off his rocker. He is of sound mind and apparently rather sound in body. He is probably healthier than I am, and certainly his mind is still sharp, as evidenced by his speech.

What he is doing with the statement that the cause of the schism was not doctrinal is repeating the lie that was invented about the 2021 schism and that really goes back to the formation of *Sword and Shield* in 2020: there is no doctrinal issue. The Lord has been beating the PRC for the past number of years with doctrinal controversy after doctrinal controversy, and all are ultimately centered on the one main issue whether there is that which man must do to obtain the experience of his salvation. But apparently the schism was not about doctrine. *Sword and Shield* has been writing since June 2020 about almost nothing but doctrinal controversy, but the schism was not about doctrine. Elders of the faithless consistory of Crete Protestant Reformed Church attacked my preaching, but the schism was not about doctrine. The PRC, including Professor Engelsma, had been bellyaching about Reverend Lanning’s doctrine and preaching long before he was deposed; but no, no, no, the schism was not about doctrine! The schism was just about bad behavior.

Professor Engelsma is deluded. He has repeated so often that doctrine was not the cause of the schism that

he believes his own lie. And he aimed to delude his audience.

The reformation of 2021 was a doctrinal one. In 2018 I began writing publicly about the doctrinal issues in the PRC, and I have not stopped since. All anyone talks about regarding the schism between the PRC and the RPC is doctrine. We in the RPC are mocked for our doctrine. Not only our persons are slandered, but also our doctrine is slandered. The PRC shouts that she has the right doctrine. And she shouts even louder that the RPC has the wrong doctrine. Favorite among the slanders is that Reformed Protestant doctrine is antinomian. Protestant Reformed ministers and professors preach against Reformed Protestant doctrine, although they do not have the courtesy usually to name us as their opponents. Professors write against our doctrine. Members of families on opposite sides approve or damn our doctrine. When he says that the issue in the split was not doctrine, Professor Engelsma lies against the objective facts, and he knows it. In my phone conversations with him during the time leading up to the split, the issue was doctrine. Besides, he knows us. He taught many of us. And many of us had talks with him about doctrine. As he alludes in the speech, some of us used to listen to him. He knows that we fight about doctrine. We are not petty and fault-finding and divisive people. He lies against his knowledge of us too.

But was the doctrine of repentance and forgiveness part of the split? I am not entirely sure why this is relevant, so that Professor Engelsma feels compelled to mention in his speech that the doctrine was not the cause of the split. Earlier he wrote about the doctrinal issue,

Our difference over this relation of repentance and forgiveness seems to be the main doctrinal issue between us, or, at least, very close to the heart of the main issue.²

But let us grant him his point for a moment. Who gives a snap whether a doctrine about which we now contend was part of the split or not? That is like saying that when Rev. Harold Dekker proposed universal atonement in the 1960s in the Christian Reformed Church that Prof. Homer Hoeksema should not contend with Dekker and condemn his theology because universal atonement was not part of the split in 1924. What a silly statement is Engelsma's.

In fact, the doctrine of repentance and forgiveness was and remains a part of the controversy between the PRC and the RPC. The issue from the outset was the way to God:

the way to his presence; the way to blessing, grace, joy, happiness, and peace. The doctrinal issue was that according to the heretical sermon preached on John 14:6. In that sermon the issue was also justification by faith alone, which is the same as forgiveness. The issue was especially the way to God in the experience, heart, and mind of the believer. And in that sermon the way to God, Jesus Christ alone, was shunted aside for man and his activities—Spirit-wrought activities! Engelsma makes a huge point in his speech that faith is a gift, that repentance is a gift, and thus that these things are all wrought by the Spirit. But in that John 14:6 sermon, the issue was precisely the Spirit-wrought gifts, activities, deeds, and works of man as part of the way to God. These were said to be part of the way to the Father. Jesus was one part of the way, and man's Spirit-wrought activities were another part.

That the doctrine of repentance and forgiveness was a huge part of the doctrinal issue in the split was not spelled out so clearly until Professor Engelsma's comments on Malachi 3:7.³ But that is beside the point. The heart of the issue in the controversy—and it is the heart of the issue in the subject of Professor Engelsma's speech—is really very easily stated: Are there activities of man—gifts, Spirit-wrought, by grace—that precede blessings of God, so that those blessings of God cannot and do not come until the activities are performed? Are the activities of man—gifts, Spirit-wrought, by grace—the way to God and the experience of his forgiveness and thus of peace with God? The answer of the PRC is yes. And it is the RPC's contention, and has been from the beginning, that this is a Pelagian and Arminian conception. Professor Engelsma's teaching that repentance is the way unto the forgiveness of sins is simply one species of that main issue.

Not Judging, but Judging

Second, the other lie with which Professor Engelsma begins his speech is the following:

My purpose is not a discussion of the recent division in the PRC. It is not my purpose to offer judgment on the division. Emphatically, it is not my purpose to criticize the leaders of the movement that has left the PRC and who now, on their part, severely criticize the PRC and their ministry.

In the very speaking of these words, Professor Engelsma offers his judgment. The division was but a "movement." Later he becomes more pointed when

2 David J. Engelsma, "Ignorant, Lying, or Merely Mistaken," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 14 (March 15, 2022): 13. Page references for subsequent quotations from this letter are given in text.

3 David J. Engelsma, "Professor Engelsma to Terry Dykstra, June 14, 2021"; "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum, June 14, 2021"; and "Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum and Terry Dykstra, June 16, 2021," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (March 15, 2021): 9–12.

he calls the division “schism,” and the leaders he pronounces guilty of “accusatory allegations” and foolish “doctrinal meanderings.” A little further along he speaks of the “leaders of the schism.” Afterward he mentions “the doctrine of the schismatics.” He turns quickly from his purpose “not...to offer judgment” or “to criticize the leaders of the movement that left the PRC.” He likes to play that he is aloof from the fray. But he cannot play that game. He must criticize those in the Reformed Protestant Churches and their doctrine. That is not my demand, but that is Christ’s demand and the demand of the scriptures. Professor Engelsma must name the false teachers, and he must condemn without compromise their teaching as false. In this instance he needs to damn us for our false doctrine and for our schism. What is this business about not offering judgment, while throughout the speech he offers judgment that we are schismatics? And what is this business about not criticizing so serious a sinner as the schismatic? After all, the apostle Paul damns the schismatic in very hard terms: “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Cor. 3:17). According to Engelsma’s stated purpose, he does the work of the Lord lackadaisically and keeps back his sword from blood. His stated purpose is also just a lot of lowbrow rhetoric.

I will do his work for him. To the PRC the members of the RPC are schismatics. To the PRC we are false teachers. We are buffoons, idiots, liars, deceivers, hard, and hardened people. We corrupt the gospel. We corrupt repentance. We endanger souls. We are antinomians. We make the work of discipline virtually impossible because we will not tell sinners to repent in order to be forgiven. We confirm the sinner in his sins and cause him to perish because we will not call him to repent in order to be forgiven.

What Engelsma Said Earlier

What begins with a lie cannot contain the truth. The way that Professor Engelsma starts carries through the rest of the speech. It is a fine piece of deception. In the speech he is not even honest with what he previously wrote. I note that in support of his doctrine, he appeals to some scripture texts; but the texts that should be his bulwark, he does not quote. He does not appeal to Malachi 3:7: “Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.”

Earlier, he wrote about Malachi 3:7,

We do draw nigh to God; God calls us seriously to do so; and there is a sense, a certain, specific sense, in which our drawing nigh precedes God’s drawing nigh to us. To deny this is to contradict the inspired Word of God.⁴

And again, he wrote, “First, to repeat, there is a vitally important sense in which, in our salvation, our drawing nigh to God precedes God’s drawing nigh to us.”⁵

In his recent speech he also does not appeal to James 4:8: “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”

I will remind the reader what Engelsma said back in 2022 about the James passage:

First, it is clear as the sun in the heavens that the text teaches an activity of ours in the sphere of salvation, namely, drawing nigh to God, that precedes God’s activity in some sense of drawing nigh to us: “he will [thus and then; note the future tense: ‘will’—DJE] draw nigh to you.” One who cannot or will not notice that the text plainly teaches a certain activity of ours that precedes an activity of God is disqualified as a teacher of the Word of God, and a teacher at all, so plain, so explicit is the text: “draw nigh to God [in the present], and he will [in the future] draw nigh to you.”⁶

Engelsma wrote previously concerning the Malachi passage that there is a certain, vital sense in which man is first in drawing near to God. He doubled down in the James passage. We draw nigh to God first (by grace, of course), and then—and only then—does God draw nigh to us with forgiveness and peace. This, Engelsma says, is the way God works. This is what forgiveness in the way of repentance is supposed to mean. This is the plain word of scripture. No matter to Engelsma that he ungodly God. And this is supposed to be so clear that we all are idiots and disqualified as teachers for not seeing it. He has not taken those statements back, and they stand as expressions of his doctrine. In a certain, vital sense (by grace, of course) man is first in returning to God, and then God turns to man.

To anyone who thinks that he is teaching that man is first, Engelsma explained to the idiots,

To do justice to James 4:8 by affirming that the text teaches that there is a certain aspect of

4 Engelsma, “Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum, June 14, 2021,” 10.

5 Engelsma, “Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum and Terry Dykstra, June 16, 2021,” 11.

6 David J. Engelsma, “Copy of the Lecture on ‘Antinomism’ given to my Reformed Doctrines Class on January 26, 2022,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 16 (March 15, 2022): 4.

salvation in which our activity precedes a certain aspect of God's activity of saving us does not imply that James teaches that the believing sinner is first in salvation and that God is second, as my critics so eagerly and typically rashly charge against James and me. For the truth of the text is that we draw nigh to God by virtue of God's drawing us nigh to Himself. The full truth of the text is, "I will draw you nigh to myself by the Holy Ghost, so that in the way of your drawing nigh to me, I will draw nigh to you." God is first in this aspect of salvation also. He draws us to Himself, *and He draws us nigh to Himself by the admonition of James 4, "Draw nigh to God!" By the admonition that so offends my critics!*⁷

What? So what Professor Engelsma is saying is that man is first, only that God makes man first so that God can be first? Again, Engelsma ungodd God himself, so that God binds himself and his blessing to man's working first (by grace, of course).

In a letter that Engelsma passed around, he wrote on the subject again,

God works in such a way that He moves us to act in order that He may then act in the way He has determined. In that particular aspect of salvation, God works in such a way that our activity (which He accomplishes) precedes His activity. The precise reference was to His act of the forgiving of our sins. Our repenting precedes His remission of our sins. My statement was as follows:⁸ "It pleases God... to forgive in the way of the sinner's repenting... Neither is repentance the cause of forgiveness... [As an aspect of faith it is] the (God-worked) means. It is not the cause... The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance. (12)

Again, he wrote, "...repentance as an aspect of faith. Repentance is not a 'good work' of the sinner that is a 'fruit' of faith produced by the sinner, but an element of faith itself" (14).

Here repentance is an aspect of faith and a means unto forgiveness! Reformed theology is very clear that faith is the only means of salvation and especially the only means

of forgiveness. The Reformed faith is also clear that faith is one thing and repentance is another thing. But here we have repentance as a part of faith and repentance as a means unto forgiveness. I will say right here that if I deny that repentance is the way unto the end or blessing of forgiveness, then I emphatically deny that repentance is an aspect of faith and that repentance is a means unto forgiveness. That is plain justification by works. We are justified by faith alone. We are forgiven by faith alone.

Engelsma also wrote, "God works this aspect of salvation in such a way that He (sovereignly) moves the elect sinner to repentance so that, following this repentance, He may forgive" (13).

Here we have God's hands so tied by the necessity of the sinner's repentance—a gift, Spirit-wrought, by grace—that God *may* only forgive following the sinner's repentance. *May*. God does not have the right or the power to forgive unless and until the sinner repents (by grace, of course).

And Engelsma wrote the following regarding the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our debts":

I explain the sense of the entire list of "if then" texts that my questioner presents to me by a brief explanation of another of the passages, Matthew 6:14, 15. God not only wills to forgive our debts to Him, but He also wills that we forgive each other. Therefore He instructs us that He "will" {note well the future tense—DJE} forgive us *when we forgive each other and in the way of our forgiving each other*. He warns us that if we refuse to forgive each other, neither will He forgive us.⁹

Forgiving one another is an act of love. So now what we have is the sinner first performing an act of love, and then and only then will God forgive. Love is works. This is forgiveness by faith and works, which is justification by faith and works.

About the relationship between repentance and forgiveness, Engelsma wrote,

His reference was to my assertion that in a certain aspect of God's work of salvation God works in such a way that He moves us to act in order that He may then act in the way He has determined. In that particular aspect of salvation, God works in such a way that our activity (which He accomplishes) precedes His activity. The precise

7 Engelsma, "Copy of the Lecture on 'Antinomism,'" 4.

8 Professor Engelsma refers here to what he wrote in a September 2, 2021, family letter, which with some additions and subtractions was published as a blog for the Reformed Free Publishing Association: "'Post Hoc, Ergo Propter Hoc?' Non!, or, 'Don't Kill the Rooster!'" September 8, 2021, <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc-non-or-don-t-kill-the-rooster>.

9 Engelsma, "Copy of the Lecture on 'Antinomism,'" 5.

reference was to His act of the forgiving of our sins. Our repenting precedes His remission of our sins. (12)

Our repenting precedes God's remission in order that God may then act in the way that he determined. Man's repentance—a gift, Spirit-wrought, by grace—is the trigger that allows God to act. God may not act until we act (by grace, of course).

A New Approach

I bring up Engelsma's previous comments because he does not repeat them in his recent speech. Indeed, the speech has the appearance that he is pulling in his horns. The speech has the appearance that he is walking back what he previously wrote and spoke. No more is he saying that in a certain, vital sense man is first. He says nothing about how repentance is an aspect of faith. In the one passage from Acts 3:19 that he cites to support his doctrine, where he could have taught that the sinner repents in order that God may forgive him, Engelsma is silent on his previous comments. There is no man must repent—by grace, of course—and God may forgive him. If Engelsma were honest with what he previously wrote and spoke, he should have said these things in this speech.

The ostensible purpose of the speech was to make sure that the Protestant Reformed people and maybe some Reformed Protestant people who will still listen to him would not be confused on the doctrine of the relationship between repentance and forgiveness. Those previous phrases that he used and the statements that he made were clear and let everyone actually know what he means by “in the way of our repenting He forgives” (13). But Engelsma falls silent on those previous statements and phrases. He now trumpets the plain phrase “in the way of,” so that repeatedly—ad nauseum—in the speech he tells his audience that “God forgives sins in the way of our repentance.”

He states that the PRC has not changed her doctrine but that the PRC is teaching only what Hoeksema taught. But that is not true. Hoeksema did not mean by *in the way of* that man is in a certain sense first. He reprobated that thought repeatedly. He did not teach that *in the way of* means that we repent in order that God may forgive us. And Hoeksema certainly did not teach that repentance is an aspect of faith! Or that repentance is a means unto forgiveness! Or that man repents that God *may* forgive him!

In this speech Engelsma never actually gets around to telling his audience what he means by “in the way of.” He talks about how good teachers distinguish properly. Distinguishing properly is the last encouragement that Protestant Reformed people and ministers need. They

have distinguished the truth to death. But what about good teachers *defining* properly? Every good teacher who wants to be clear and to be understood should properly define his terms. Those are not my words but Engelsma's own advice to his students. And he does not follow his own advice. One of the crucial questions about the whole speech is, what does “in the way of” actually mean? He never answers it. The phrase is just a mantra. The closest he comes to a definition is this:

In the way of means, and can be expressed thus: the repenting of the sinner is an aspect of the way in which God forgives sins. It is part of the work of God of forgiving.

But this amounts to saying that a cow is a cowy thing. “In the way of” means the way God forgives. That is not a definition.

Professor Engelsma comes a little closer to an actual description of what he means by “in the way of” when repeatedly throughout his speech he substitutes the words *before* or *precedes* for the phrase “in the way of.” But that still is not a definition. Our argument with the PRC is not about whether repentance is *before* or *after* anything. Our argument is regarding these questions: What is repentance? What is the relationship of repentance to forgiveness? What in the world do the PRC mean by forgiveness in the way of repentance? But Engelsma has told us in many words in many letters and other speeches what he means by forgiveness in the way of repentance. He pretends that he is just teaching what Hoeksema did. But Engelsma goes far past Hoeksema. Engelsma means that in a certain sense man is first, that repentance as a part of faith is a means unto forgiveness, and that sinners repent in order that God *may* forgive them. And that is the plain, old heresy of justification by faith and works.

Engelsma defends his doctrine of forgiveness in the way of repentance—repent in order to be forgiven; repent first, and then God will forgive; and repentance as a means unto forgiveness—by appealing to the fact that repentance is a gift. He says in the speech,

That repentance is the way to forgiveness does not jeopardize the gospel of salvation by grace...The repentance of the sinner is God's gift to him. God causes the elect sinner to sorrow over his sins and to turn to him for the deliverance of forgiveness.

That repentance is a gift has no bearing on the question of its relationship to forgiveness. Repentance is a gift. It is Spirit-wrought. It is a wonder of grace. But repentance still is not the way unto the blessing of forgiveness. Repentance is not the way unto forgiveness for the simple reason that repentance is a fruit of faith. Repentance

is not a means unto forgiveness. Repentance is not an aspect of faith. Repentance is the fruit of faith. We are forgiven by faith alone. That faith by which alone we are forgiven bears the fruit of repentance. When faith does that is frankly immaterial to me. Repentance is not the way unto forgiveness because repentance is not faith! Faith alone! Faith alone! Leave repentance out of it! Whatever you might call repentance, it is not faith! Faith is the only instrument of forgiveness because of what faith is. Faith is not repentance! Faith is the union of the elect sinner with Christ. Faith justifies because it joins the elect sinner with Christ and receives his perfection, which when it becomes the sinner's is more than sufficient to forgive all his sins now and forever.

No Support in Hoeksema

In support of his doctrine, Professor Engelsma makes a feeble appeal to Hoeksema's commentary on Lord's Day 51 concerning the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer. But in the portion of the commentary that Engelsma quotes in his speech, Hoeksema wrote not a word about forgiveness in the way of repentance. I know that Hoeksema used the phrase *in the way of*, and so I must say that there is not a word in his commentary about repentance as an aspect of faith, repentance as a means unto forgiveness, and repenting so that God *may* forgive the sinner.

I will quote the section from Hoeksema that Engelsma cites in his speech because the section is edifying:

This fifth petition...simply [prays] for the application of this atonement in the forgiveness of sins to the heart of the believer that lives in the midst of the world...We are aware that God is terribly displeased with all sin. But we ask Him [in the fifth petition—DJE] to dismiss our sins from His mind that He will never be angry with us...For all this we ask in this fifth petition: We desire to have the forgiveness of sins. We desire to possess it, to be assured of it in our deepest heart. We long to know and be assured that God has so forgiven, dismissed, cancelled my debts...We want to have that blessing of the forgiveness of sins *now*, at once, in this world, while we are still in the flesh (*The Triple Knowledge*, vol. 3, pp. 582–605).

Where is forgiveness in the way of repentance here? And even more, where is repent that you may be forgiven, or repent in order that God may forgive you, or repentance as an aspect of faith and a means unto your forgiveness? They are not here.

Engelsma should know though that Hoeksema also wrote the following in his commentary on the fifth petition regarding what he calls “a serious limiting clause”:

But now comes the test. If he really tasted the depth of sin, of sorrow after God, if he really experienced the riches of mercy and of remission of sin, that servant is inevitably merciful and must show mercy to his brethren. If he is not merciful, there is the proof that he never tasted the grace of God, and that, though outwardly it was proclaimed to him that his sins are forgiven, yet the Spirit never witnessed of this unspeakable grace in his heart.¹⁰

Engelsma says that God will “forgive us when we forgive each other and in the way of our forgiving each other.” Hoeksema taught that when a man tastes the grace of forgiveness, he will forgive. That is what Hoeksema taught. And I believe that goes a long way to explaining what he meant by *in the way of* as well. There is an inevitability to repentance. Still more, Hoeksema taught that the forgiveness of the neighbor is not a way unto forgiveness of sins but is a test, a proof, that the sinner has been forgiven. So much for the PRC not having changed her doctrine.

The Creeds Stand with Us

By appeals to scripture and the creeds, Engelsma defends his doctrine and criticizes the Reformed Protestant doctrine. What of his appeals?

He appeals to Lord's Day 51 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the fifth petition. The creed reads,

Q. 126. Which is the fifth petition?

A. *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*; that is, be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood, not to impute to us poor sinners our transgressions, nor that depravity which always cleaves to us; even as we feel this evidence of Thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 139)

Engelsma says that the creed teaches “the sorrow over sin that motivates the fifth petition, that is, repentance, is the way to receive and experience forgiveness.” But the creed does not mention a way at all. Certainly, the Catechism does not teach that repentance is a way unto the blessing of forgiveness. That is not even in the words. There is sorrow expressed. But the way unto forgiveness

10 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 3:603.

that is presented in the Catechism is Christ and his blood. He is the only way to forgiveness and to peace. The sorrowing sinner is a believing sinner. By the sorrow he shows his faith. By his faith he is forgiven. This is the teaching of the creed on the fifth petition. The Lord's Day stands on our side.

Engelsma also appeals to Canons 5.7. He says that this is "clear and conclusive" against the Reformed Protestants. He says that the article is "decisive in the controversy." He says,

Repentance is...the urgent desire and ardent request for forgiveness that is lacking and needed. Sinners repent "that" they may receive and experience forgiveness.

His reference to "that" is to the language of the article, which I quote from our received version:

For, in the first place, in these falls He preserves in them the incorruptible seed of regeneration from perishing, or being totally lost; and again, by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, *that* they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 174, emphasis added)

Now, Professor Engelsma should know better than I do that our received translation is not good. Expressed in the article is a cause-and-effect relationship between the renewing work of the Spirit and what follows. So the article should read as follows:

By his Word and Spirit, he certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, in order that they should sincerely sorrow after God over the sins committed, that they should through faith, with a contrite heart, desire and obtain forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator...

There is an emphasis in the article on two things that are effects of the Spirit's work of renewal. First is repentance. Second is faith. It is through faith that elect sinners seek and obtain forgiveness. That repentance is present is natural, for the Spirit who works faith also grants repentance. But in the article and on the language of the article, faith is how sinners receive forgiveness. Repentance is the accompanying grace that gives evidence of the faith. Besides, even on the face of it, the article does not speak of repentance as a "way" to a desired end." The article is

stating a fact about the Spirit's renewal of the sinner, and that is why the article includes repentance. The believing sinner is likewise the repentant sinner. But faith and repentance are two different things. Faith is that by which the sinner is justified. Repentance is faith's evidence and characterizes faith's whole approach unto God. I might add, yet again, that Engelsma has previously defined "in the way of repentance" to mean that we repent first that God may forgive us, that we repent in order to be forgiven, and that repentance is an aspect of faith. And there is absolutely nothing about that in Canons 5.7. The article stands on our side.

Scripture Is on Our Side

Engelsma cites Luke 24:47: "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Engelsma says, "Jesus taught not only that as the way to remission of sins repentance precedes remission..." Where do you find in this verse that repentance precedes remission, unless one is arguing from the mere order of the words? Christ said that two things were to be taught: repentance and remission. In the verse Jesus, in fact, posits no relationship between repentance and remission. The explanation of the passage is that repentance is to be preached as the evidence and fruit of the faith by which alone one receives remission of sins.

Engelsma cites 2 Corinthians 7:10 against us: "That repentance is the way to forgiveness is the clear teaching of II Corinthians 7:10: 'For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.'"

I will use John Calvin, not a radical Reformed Protestant, to answer him:

Paul seems to make repentance the ground of salvation. Were it so, it would follow, that we are justified by works. I answer, that we must observe what Paul here treats of, for he is not inquiring as to the ground of salvation, but simply commending repentance from the fruit which it produces, he says that it is like a way by which we arrive at salvation. Nor is it without good reason; for Christ *calls us* by way of free favour, but it is *to repentance*. (Matt ix.13.) God by way of free favour pardons our sins, but only when we renounce them. Nay more, God accomplishes in us at one and the same time two things: being renewed by repentance, we are delivered from the *bondage* of our sins; and, being justified by faith, we are delivered also from the *curse* of our sins. They are, therefore, inseparable fruits of grace, and, in consequence of their invariable connection, repentance may

with fitness and propriety be represented as an introduction to salvation, but in this way of speaking of it, it is represented as an *effect* rather than as a *cause*.¹¹

Calvin mentions repentance as a kind of way and then goes on to explain what he means. Faith and repentance are inseparable, but each has its own function. Faith brings justification. Repentance delivers from the bondage of sin. Repentance is not a way unto the forgiveness of sins, although it is always present in the believer who is forgiven by faith alone. Now I add again that “in the way of repentance” for Professor Engelsma means not what Calvin describes but that we repent first that God may forgive us, that repentance is an aspect of faith and a means unto forgiveness. And for Calvin there is nothing of that in the passage at all. The passage stands on our side.

I also note for Professor Engelsma’s sake and for the reader’s sake Calvin’s commentary regarding Hosea 14:8, “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.” Calvin writes,

Some so explain this, as though God promised to be propitious to Israel after they had manifested their repentance. But they pervert the sense of the Prophet; for, on the contrary, he says, that after the Israelites shall perceive, and find even by the effect, that God is propitious to them, they will then say, “How foolish and mad we were, while we followed idols? It is now then time that our souls should recumb on God.” Why? “Because we see that there is nothing better for us than to live under his safeguard and protection; for he hears us, he regards us, he is to us like a shady tree, so that he protects us under his shadow.” We now perceive how these two clauses are connected together; for God shows the reason why Ephraim will renounce his idols, because he will perceive that he was miserably deceived as long as he wandered after his idols. How will he perceive this? Because he will see that he is now favoured by the Lord, and that he was before destitute of his help. When God then shall give such a proof to his people, he will at the same time produce this effect, that they will cast away all false confidences, and confess that they were miserable and wretched while they were attached to idols. He therefore says, *I have heard and favoured him*. What is then later in the words

of the Prophet goes before; it precedes in the order of things, this clause, *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do with idols*?¹²

Here Calvin says that the order of the passage as it appears needs to be inverted. It appears in the verse that Ephraim repents first, and then God forgives or hears Ephraim. Calvin says that to explain the passage according to this apparent order is to “pervert the sense of the Prophet.” The Israelites first understand that God is propitious to them, that God is favorable to them. So Calvin says that the reason that Ephraim renounces his idols—repents—is that he will see that he is now favored by the Lord. What is remarkable here in this passage is that Calvin teaches the very doctrine that Engelsma ridicules as being outside the pale of the Reformed faith and of Christianity itself and in the very words that Engelsma ridicules. Israel first perceives that God is favorable. Then Israel repents. Calvin stands on our side.

Engelsma has a very odd explanation of Acts 3:19. The passage reads, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” The literal language of the passage is “Repent...in order that your sins may be blotted out.” This should be one of Engelsma’s most potent passages to teach that sinners repent in order to be forgiven. He taught that previously as the meaning of forgiveness in the way of repentance. The passage also speaks of repentance in order that you may be forgiven. And he said earlier that we repent in order that God may forgive us. You would think that, as he has done previously, he would tell us idiots, who cannot understand the plain English grammar of the literal words of the text, that we have a contention with the Holy Spirit if we cannot see that Acts 3:19 teaches that we repent in order that we may be forgiven. But he does not. The only thing germane to the subject at hand that he says is, “Repentance, which is the way to this blotting out, precedes the blotting out, that is, forgiveness.” This is a bit of a letdown. What about the literal wording of the text? Is Peter teaching the poor people only that they must first repent? Really?

For one, let the PRC be bold. If the PRC will hang her doctrinal hat on Acts 3:19, then be bold and say that we repent in order to be forgiven by God; we repent in order that God may forgive us—the obvious implication being that repentance is the condition of forgiveness—and if we do not repent, then notwithstanding that God

11 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 2:274–75.

12 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans. John Owen, vol. 1, *Hosea* (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 501–2.

wants to forgive us and that Christ died for us, there is no forgiveness.

But that would expose the PRC. And so Engelsma lamely avoids actually interpreting Acts 3:19 and preaches to the Protestant Reformed choir—which already believes that repentance is the way to forgiveness and could not really care less what the actual meaning of the text is but just wants another proof text.

The meaning of Acts 3:19 is that Peter is demanding of the people that they show some evidence of faith. They had shown the evidence of their unbelief when they crucified Christ. The evidence of repentance is the evidence of the faith that justifies and thus grants to them the blotting out of sins. The passage stands on our side.

I note only in passing two more points that Professor Engelsma makes. He ridicules the idea that repentance is a work and that repentance belongs to thankfulness. He says,

Hoeksema taught that repentance is the way to forgiveness and as such is the desire for forgiveness, not the expression of gratitude for forgiveness already granted apart from repentance.

Again:

Repentance is not the spiritual expression of gratitude for a remission of sins already received, but the urgent desire and ardent request for forgiveness that is lacking and needed.

And Engelsma adds this:

Repentance is not the same as a “good work” of obedience to the law of God, as good works are described in Q. 91 of the Heidelberg Catechism. It is essential to the theology of the RPC and RRP [*sic*] that it describes repentance as a good work. Then it can charge the doctrine that teaches forgiveness in the way of repentance as a doctrine that makes forgiveness dependent upon the good work of the believer. Repentance is, of course, a good spiritual activity—a wonderfully good activity, for it is an aspect of the saving work of God of forgiving sins. But it is not a good work.

Here Engelsma runs afoul of the creed. First, the Heidelberg Catechism treats repentance in the third section on thankfulness. He must deal with that and explain it. Second, the Heidelberg Catechism treats the fifth petition, which includes sorrow for sin, in the third section and in the section on the chief part of our thankfulness, which is prayer. He must deal with that and explain it. In his criticism he has a problem with the creed.

An Old Saw

Engelsma notes that the Reformed Protestant doctrine makes men careless and profane. He says,

Denial of the truth that repentance is the way of the forgiveness of sins is serious error. It encourages carelessness of life and a continuing in sin.

Ah, yes, the old saw that the apostle Paul’s enemies leveled against him. I thank Professor Engelsma for the badge of honor. Over against that I note that no one would ever object that his doctrine would make men careless and profane. No one! Right along with that I note that no Reformed denomination, save the RPC, would object to his doctrine. Protestant Reformed ministers are hobnobbing with ministers from all the Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. Relations are warm and cozy. Why? Because there is no fundamental difference in doctrine. Ministers from the Reformed and Presbyterian denominations will let the PRC have her traditional hobbyhorses to ride. Only grant those other denominations that man does have a certain, vital role to play in his salvation, and they can be good friends. The PRC, like the rest of the denominations, has also given man a place in his salvation. The PRC too is very careful that no one charges her doctrine with being careless and profane. No wonder the Protestant Reformed people who are leaving the denomination have no problem going to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) or to the United Reformed Churches. Engelsma wrote a letter a while back about the errors of the OPC and that taking membership there is wrong for a Protestant Reformed person. I think the people can see through that hypocrisy. The Protestant Reformed doctrine and the Orthodox Presbyterian doctrine of repentance and forgiveness are the same: it is Norman Shepherd’s doctrine, which is the doctrine of the 1953 majority report to Classis East, which is the doctrine of Hubert De Wolf.

Engelsma claims that the Reformed Protestants cannot do discipline with their doctrine. He says,

By rejecting the truth that the way to forgiveness is repentance, the RPC and RRC make discipline impossible. What do elders now say to impenitent sinners? What do parents now say to sinning children? What do members of the congregation now say to fellow members who are living in sin? Now, none may call on any of them to repent for the forgiveness of sins.

I have been involved in a lot of discipline work over the years, and I do not remember ever telling someone to repent for the forgiveness of his sins. I have told sinners to repent because their way of life is displeasing to God,

that God hates sin. I have told sinners that Jesus Christ forgives sinners who show repentance. I have said a lot of things along those lines. What is wrong with telling sinners that they must repent because their sins are displeasing to God? What about telling sinners to repent because they stand in danger of hellfire? What about telling sinners to repent because they are breaking the law of God, destroying their own souls, and injuring the name of God? What about telling sinners to repent for repentance's sake because living in sin is displeasing to God, and a contrite heart God does not despise? So Engelsma's charge is just rhetoric that stems from his false view of the relationship between repentance and forgiveness.

I also note that Engelsma's view of the Christian experience is wrong. He says,

Finally, the doctrine of the schismatics is spiritually devastating to believers. How can we live without forgiveness of sins and, therefore, without repenting? We *need* repentance as the way to the forgiveness of our sins. Like the psalmist in Psalm 32, so long as we remain impenitent, God's hand is heavy upon us. Only when we repent is His hand lifted, and He lifts His hand by forgiving our sins.

Is that really the daily experience of the believer? Professor Engelsma sounds like the ministers in the Netherlands Reformed Congregations. God's hand is not heavy on the believer every day. This is not the normal experience of the Christian at all. David's fall is cited in the creeds as an example of a deep and melancholy fall. When the Belgic Confession in articles 23 and 24 treats repentance or mentions it in connection with justification, the Belgic does not teach that repentance is a way unto the end, justification. The Belgic treats repentance as a fruit of faith, by which we are justified. When the Belgic mentions our prayers—including our prayers for forgiveness—the creed does so as the prayers of those who have the righteousness of Christ. Scripture teaches that we draw near to God in the full assurance of faith, and to draw near in any other way—let us say in the full assurance of our repentance—is unbelief (article 26). The Heidelberg Catechism places our prayers for forgiveness in the section on thankfulness. The prayer for forgiveness is part of the chief part of our thankfulness. We are assured that what we ask in Christ's name will be granted us. That is my daily and normal experience as a Christian. I live and walk at liberty as the forgiven sinner, and as such I also sorrow daily for my sins. That is a proper Reformed and Christian experience.

What happened to David happened in God's providence so that we might have the doctrine of justification

by faith alone clearly illustrated for us, as Paul says that David teaches in Psalm 32 about the blessedness of the man to whom God does not impute iniquity and whose sins God forgives. It is exactly that doctrine of justification by faith alone that Professor Engelsma corrupts with his doctrine of repentance for forgiveness. Is justification the same as forgiveness? Is the doctrine of the two the same? In his speech he does not address the issue directly—another failure on his part to define terms properly.

The question is a vital one. Is forgiveness exactly the same as justification? Many Protestant Reformed ministers say no. Their no is both anti-creedal and telling. Their no is telling because it shows that they want to say things about the forgiveness of sins that they know they cannot say about justification. The creedal answer, of course, is that forgiveness is exactly the same as justification (Belgic Confession 23). Forgiveness is often in scripture just a shorthand way of saying justification. In justification God imputes righteousness and forgives sins. Scripture takes the part for the whole. Whenever scripture mentions forgiveness, then the doctrine of justification by faith alone is being discussed. So then, are we justified in the way of our repentance? And then where is that in Romans chapters 3 through 5? Where is that at all in these chapters? There is no repentance in these chapters because we are not justified in the way of repentance. Neither then are we forgiven in the way of repentance. That is not because repentance is unnecessary or not important or not demanded, but it is because repentance is not faith. We are justified by faith alone. Repentance is the inevitable fruit of faith. Knowing God by faith and being justified by faith alone apart from repentance, in repentance we love that God and hate our sins. We are justified and we are forgiven by faith alone without works, including repentance. The Protestant formula about justification by faith alone without works applies also to repentance. As all works are excluded from justification, so all repentance must be excluded too.

A Simple Explanation

I conclude with a simple explanation of faith, forgiveness, and repentance.

Faith is the bond of the elect sinner with Christ. In that bond the elect sinner holds for truth all that God has revealed in his word and has the assured confidence that everlasting righteousness and eternal life are freely granted him for Christ's sake.

Forgiveness is one aspect of justification, and so forgiveness is also a shorthand way of speaking about justification. We are forgiven by faith alone without works and deeds, including the work and deed of repentance.

Repentance is the fruit of faith. Repentance is the

inevitable fruit of faith. What the Reformed creeds say about the impossibility of the justified believer not performing works applies to the truth of repentance. It is impossible that the justified believer not repent. Repentance is not faith. Repentance is not an aspect of faith. Repentance is the fruit of faith.

The Reformed churches that hold these things call sinners to repentance as that repentance is the clear and unmistakable evidence of the faith by which alone one is justified, as that which is pleasing to God, as that which is the calling of the one who loves God, and with the warning that all who continue in their wicked and ungrateful lives are not saved. When sinners repent, they are not received again into the favor of God, the favor of the church, and the favor of the family in the way of their repentance but by faith in Jesus Christ, their only savior. The evidence of that is their repentance.

Why does a sinner repent? God elected him. Christ died for him and took away his sins at the tree of the cross. The Holy Spirit works in the elect sinner's heart. Repentance is not to get something. If a sinner repents to get something, then that repentance is corrupt and amounts to worldly sorrow. He is forgiven by faith alone that comes absolutely empty, empty even of the sinner's own repentance.

I frankly do not know why the doctrine of faith, forgiveness, and repentance is so hard to grasp or why it is so hated. I have an idea of why it is hated. It is hated for the very reason that the Jews hated Jesus. It gives man no part in his salvation.

I have an analysis of the speech, not a doctrinal analysis. Why this speech and why now? I have it on good authority that there was a question-and-answer period after the speech and that during that question-and-answer period Professor Engelsma did a lot of dodging and weaving in his answers or conceded certain crucial points in this controversy about faith and about repentance. He published the text of the speech that he gave, and he tells us that he did this after the fact because he only changed a few things from the spoken version. Was there a recording that he used? Was there a recording of the questions and answers? Why did he conveniently not publish the question-and-answer section? At least publish the questions that were asked; and even if he could not remember the answers word for word, give a written response.

Professor Engelsma is talking to someone. He says that he is talking to

people in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) and in the Remnant Reformed Church (RRC) who will still listen to me, some of whom I have reason to believe will be present at this class.

If there are those—also in the RPC—who are enamored of Engelsma's theology on repentance, they can have it. It is rot. It teaches justification by faith and by works of faith, or justification by faith and by the fruits of faith.

The Protestant Reformed Classis East, which met February 8, 2024, made an abysmal decision. In that decision the ministers and elders approved theology that teaches that there is that which man must do—many holy and pious exercises—to obtain the possession of his salvation. The men of the classis approved the theology that man looks to his works for the assurance of his justification. Professor Engelsma with his statement that the PRC has not changed in her doctrine is deluded there too. He is not even living in the reality of where his own denomination is. Let us say that by “in the way of repentance” Engelsma does mean whatever Hoeksema meant by *in the way of*. Engelsma's denomination by official decision showed that it has moved far away from Hoeksema. Can you imagine Hoeksema writing that you look to your works for the assurance of your justification or that there is that which man must do to obtain the possession of his salvation? Good time then for Engelsma to make sure everyone knows that the RPC is a bunch of lunatics and to shore up the view for the nervous Protestant Reformed members that the PRC has not changed. There was even an opportunity to address Reformed Protestant members, who are dissatisfied with the churches, who really are still Protestant Reformed, who like Israel want to go back to Egypt, and who might be nervous about where their own crackpot leaders are going next. Engelsma offers to the anxious the delusional stability of the PRC. This is pure speculation on my part, but I do not think that I am far off.

For my part I do not believe and I am not going to teach forgiveness in the way of repentance. I certainly do not intend to teach that man must first repent, and then God may forgive him; or that man must first repent in order that God forgive him; or that repentance is an aspect of faith. No, faith is one thing. By faith we are forgiven and that without works. Repentance is another thing. Repentance is the fruit of faith. Repentance is an aspect of the sinner's love of God, and so repentance also involves the sinner's hatred of sin. By faith alone without works (repentance), we are forgiven. The evidence of that faith is repentance. Faith and repentance are to be distinguished, never confused, and not separated.

God has sent to the Protestant Reformed Churches, with her doctrine of repentance for forgiveness, a strong delusion and many strong deluders to strengthen the members in that delusion so that they might believe a lie.

May God graciously deliver his own, bring them to repentance, and forgive all their sins, by faith alone.

—NJL

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

DECEITFUL DEALINGS

Introduction

In the church world at large, also in reportedly conservative churches, there is an ongoing, systematic effort to dismantle the truth of the word of God. The words of the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 ring true: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” Truly, we see that falling away from the truth and the love of many waxing cold toward God and his truth.

The church of Jesus Christ then is relentlessly assaulted by attacks on almost every doctrine of the sacred scriptures. The list includes, but is not limited to, the doctrines of election and reprobation, the inspiration of scripture, creation, man and the image of God, marriage as a life-long bond, the sufficiency of the cross of Christ, universal atonement, justification by faith alone, the unconditional covenant, sovereign grace, the requirement of church membership, the Christian school as the demand of the covenant, infant baptism, and the doctrine of the end times.

False doctrine more and more is finding a safe haven in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches. And these doctrines have found a place in the hearts of many of these churches’ members. Many believe these false doctrines or, at a minimum, tolerate them in their midst, which is equally as ruinous. And when confronted by the truth of God’s word over against the false doctrine to which they hold, they yelp and snarl like a rabid dog who has been provoked. “It is not a salvation issue!” And by that response they reveal their ignorance of God and his word and manifest their unbelief. They reveal their disinterest in doctrine and refuse to submit to God’s word. Simply, they reveal that they do not have true faith. The burden of this article is to uncover those who cloak themselves in their deceitful dealings and leave them no safe haven for their idolatry.

Faith Generally

To begin we must take hold of the doctrine of faith and work our way to the heart of the matter. Our Reformed

confessions teach what true faith is in the well-known and loved seventh Lord’s Day of the Heidelberg Catechism. There we are taught that faith, which is one, has three aspects: it is a bond, it is an activity, and it has objective doctrinal content.

It is hard to fathom that Rev. M. McGeown denies this basic truth of scripture and the Reformed confessions. He writes,

Sometimes the gift of faith or the faculty of faith is called the bond of faith, but neither the Bible nor the confessions explicitly call faith a bond. That we are united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is certainly a biblical truth, but in the Bible and in the confessions the emphasis is on faith as the activity of believing. The Catechism defines faith not as a bond, and certainly not as a passive, lifeless bond, but as an activity.¹

Unbelievable actually!

McGeown denies that the confessions teach faith as the bond to Jesus Christ but rather puts the emphasis on faith as the activity of believing. He also denies that faith is passive. When we say that faith is passive, we mean what the Catechism teaches in question and answer 20 that faith only *receives* from Jesus Christ all his benefits. Faith does not give anything to God.

Lord’s Day 7 teaches that faith is the bond of the elect child of God with Jesus Christ. We read that those are saved “who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90). The essence of faith is a bond and union to Jesus Christ.

And the holy scriptures, which Lord’s Day 7 summarizes in the words “ingrafted into him,” teach faith as a bond. In scripture when you read of the elect sinner being “in” Christ, scripture is describing faith as a bond. The bond of faith as being “in” Christ may rightly be said to be the Holy Spirit. The word “in” is faith, the bond, the Holy Spirit, that joins the elect sinner to Christ, the only object of faith. For example, Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we

¹ Martyn McGeown, “The *Ordo Salutis* (5): Saving Faith: Given to Believe,” *Standard Bearer* 100, no. 11 (March 1, 2024): 278.

are his workmanship, created *in Christ Jesus* unto good works” (emphasis added).

The biblical concept of faith as a bond is comprehended in the idea of faith as a graft. Faith is the graft whereby a dead branch is taken by the horticulturist and placed into a living tree. The triune God takes dead men and women, elected in grace to eternal life, and joins them to Jesus Christ in the Spirit. God takes dead men and plants them into the living tree, Jesus Christ. And all the life and fatness of Christ flows into that dead branch. That dead branch lives and brings forth fruit according to its nature. John 15:5: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth *in me*, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (emphasis added).

What does Reverend Hoeksema say about faith as a bond? He does not agree at all with what Reverend McGeown is teaching.

Faith is a bond, a spiritual bond.²

The Catechism...presents it [faith] as the spiritual bond by which the believer is united with Christ.

It is the means whereby we are united with Christ, the spiritual bond whereby we are made one body, one plant with Him, so that by faith we may live from Him, draw our all from Him, and thus receive all His benefits.³

This truth that faith is the bond of the elect sinner to Jesus Christ is basic to the Reformed faith. Reverend McGeown is dealing deceitfully with the truth of God’s word. He does not stop, but continuing his foolish babbling, he writes,

Faith, we read in Belgic Confession, Article 35, “is the hand and mouth of our soul.” Hands and mouths in healthy people are active, unlike the sluggard.

According to LD 7 we *receive* all of Christ’s benefits by a true faith, which the Catechism defines as an activity (the German word is *annehmen*, which has an active idea—it actually means “accept,” although we typically avoid that word lest it should sound like such acceptance depended on man’s freewill, which it does not).⁴

I am going to let Reverend Hoeksema answer McGeown. Although the quote is lengthy, it is instructive.

“Yes,” you say, “but I must believe.” Well, let us see. Perhaps there is still an element of boasting. You say, “There is a righteousness that God has prepared, but if I am to have this righteousness, I must believe.” Well, then, let us persuade men to believe. Let us tell them that they are justified because they believe. This is the way it is generally put: “Because you believe in Christ, you shall become righteous before God.” But this is not true. Your faith does not add to your righteousness. You do not become righteous on account of your faith.

Shall we put it this way then? “Faith is the principle from which we live. Because of this, we become religious, we become pious, we repent, we pray, and we do good works. Because of these works of faith, we become righteous before God?” Not so! Works of faith do not make us righteous before God.

Shall we put it this way then? “Righteousness is ready, and faith is the hand that takes it.” Then there is still something to boast of. Then righteousness is all ready, but it must be accepted by the hand of faith. This is not faith. Faith is not an act of ours. Faith is that power whereby we receive (do not change this into “accept”!) the righteousness of God in Christ. By faith, we do not “accept.” By faith we receive. But it is nothing to boast of that we receive something.⁵

Heretics always carry their false doctrine through to its logical end with rigor. McGeown is hell-bent on making faith something man is doing. He stated as much when he said that faith is not God’s act.⁶ And to push this further, he tosses out faith as a bond because faith as a bond makes man utterly dependent on God. God must take a dead branch and place it into Christ, which is something completely outside the control of that branch. And the branch then has life and bears fruit. How dare anyone then say, “Well, the branch had to actually draw the nutrients into itself to live! The branch needed to reach out to get life from the tree!” What folly. What pride. What arrogance.

2 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:63.

3 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 1:304.

4 McGeown, “The *Ordo Salutis* (5),” 279.

5 Herman Hoeksema, *Righteous by Faith Alone: A Devotional Commentary on Romans*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), 138.

6 Martyn McGeown, “Passive Faith?,” <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/passive-faith>.

The second aspect of faith that our Reformed confessions teach is faith as to its activity: it is a certain knowledge and an assured confidence. Faith comes to conscious expression when the gospel is preached. You could say that faith consciously possesses and experiences the salvation that Christ merited and earned by the Holy Spirit when Christ comes speaking to his elect people. The Holy Spirit is not only the bond, but the Holy Spirit is also the agent or worker of all that salvation as that comes into your conscious enjoyment or possession. The activity of saving faith is the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The certain knowledge of faith is that I know God as my God. I do not merely know *about* God, but I *know* him. Like a child does not merely know *about* his father but really *knows* him, the elect child knows his Father's love toward him in Christ Jesus as a child who knows his Father intimately. Springing forth from that certain knowledge is an assured confidence. In Lord's Day 7 faith is assurance. That assurance is not by good works, obedience, or repentance. The child of God draws near unto God with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having his heart sprinkled from an evil conscience and his body washed with pure water. And with boldness the sinner can come before the throne of God asking for enormous things from his Father. Having that certain knowledge that God is my God, I rely and trust upon him entirely for all time and eternity for all things necessary for body and soul.

This knowledge of faith as well as its confidence are worked by the holy gospel in my heart and are the assurance that my sins are forgiven. It is the confidence that the remission of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are mine. In the realm of my conscious experience, my sins are forgiven, and I have the everlasting righteousness of Christ imputed to me. And that is freely given to me by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. Even that conscious activity of believing, resting, trusting, and relying is a gift of God according to election.

Third, our Reformed confessions also teach what faith is as to its objective doctrinal content. And this is the point that I want to drive home in this article. True faith believes certain things about the triune God: God the Father is my creator, God the Son is my redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit is my sanctifier. True faith believes right doctrine. True faith believes doctrine as that doctrine reveals the triune God in all his wonderful works.

True faith certainly does not believe false doctrine, nor does true faith tolerate false doctrine. And yet many will push the words across their lips that something "is not a salvation issue" and promptly follow it up with "but I believe in Jesus!" That is dealing deceitfully! One plays fast and loose with God's word and picks and chooses what he wants to believe.

To the one who claims to believe in Jesus but denies basic truths of scripture, I ask, do you? If true faith believes true doctrine, and you believe false doctrine, can I say that you have true faith? Do you actually believe in the triune God, or have you only fashioned an idol after your own image? And that is not my question; that is the question of our Reformed fathers in Lord's Day 11:

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 deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 95)

That is not my being judgmental or harsh or unloving. You may question, and you do question whether someone has true faith by examining what he or she believes. The reason for this is twofold. The first reason is so you can determine whether you are one in the truth with someone. Believers seek unity in the truth with fellow believers, and we desire to manifest that unity. Also, as Amos 3:3 states, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" The second reason is to admonish one who is found to be unbelieving of the truth that by our godly conversation he may be gained to Christ. And if that one persists in unbelief, your word to that one is to repent. You may inspect someone's doctrine and ask, "Do you actually believe in Jesus?"

The Faith

What does true faith believe? Or in the language of our Catechism,

Q. 22. What is then necessary for the Christian to believe?

A. All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 91)

True faith believes "all things promised us in the gospel." True faith believes the entire word of God. True faith does not pick and choose what it wants to believe, but true faith believes the entire revelation of God as he reveals Jesus Christ. True faith is assured of and relies on the entire word of God as revealed in the scriptures. We take the statement "all things promised us in the gospel" in the broadest possible sense to include all the knowledge of God, his will and his law, the whole counsel of God concerning our salvation in Christ, and all things revealed by God to us in the entirety of the scriptures.

All that the scriptures teach concerning God and

creation, man and sin, Christ and salvation, the Holy Spirit and sanctification, the church and the means of grace, and the coming of Christ and the eternal things of the kingdom of heaven are all included in what is necessary for a Christian to believe. In short, true faith believes all the doctrine of the sacred scriptures. Faith has for its object the one and entire word of God, of which the one content and message is Jesus Christ.

Scripture teaches this about faith when it puts a definite article before the word “faith.” A definite article makes a noun particular, and it is a reference to something specific. So instead of *a faith*, it is *the faith*. And when scripture makes faith definite, then it is teaching the content of faith as all the doctrine that God has revealed in his word, which our Reformed confessions then faithfully summarize, which we believe do fully agree with the word of God.

The faith is the substance of the Christian faith and what is believed by Christians. Scripture often speaks about faith in this way. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). There is no sense in Jude 1:3 if it is not understood this way. Faith here is referred to as that doctrine for which the saints are earnestly contending. God delivered his word to his church containing true doctrine, and the saints of the church of all ages fought for that doctrine of the word of God over against the vain babblings of man, his junk science, novel ideas, and unprofitable questions about the law.

Sometimes scripture does not put a definite article before faith, but it still refers to the objective, doctrinal content of faith. The books of Timothy and Titus use the noun “faith” this way often. It is a bit of a key for unlocking the instruction of Paul in these epistles. Each of the books are concerned with sound doctrine: godly edifying, which is the faith; holding the mystery of the faith; boldness in the faith; not departing from the faith; nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine; not denying the faith; having damnation because they have cast off their first faith; erring from the faith; following after faith; keeping the faith; being a son in the common faith; rebuking those so that they may be sound in the faith; and loving those who are in the faith. This is not to mention either the repeated times that the word “doctrine” is explicitly mentioned in Titus and Timothy. That which was committed to Timothy was the faith, and the faith is doctrine. The doctrine is the food of the church’s soul. And committed to the charge of the minister is that he continue in sound doctrine and put the brethren in remembrance of these things. There is a doctrine that is

according to godliness. There is a doctrine that leads to godliness. There is a real connection between true doctrine and the godliness of the people in the church. And negatively, therefore, false doctrine leads to ungodliness.

The faith is all the truth of the sacred scriptures and the Reformed faith. *The faith* is what true faith believes. *The faith* is faith’s objective content, the doctrine that God has revealed in his word.

The church world is busy trying to dismantle this third aspect of faith. A recent Bible study discussion paper from Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church teaches that there are three different levels of doctrine: absolute doctrines, conviction doctrines, and opinion doctrines. Absolute truths are those doctrines necessary for salvation—“salvation issues,” if you will. Conviction truths are doctrines that cause division between denominations but are not so great that we cannot call those denominations Christian. Opinion truths are all those differences that can coexist within the same denomination. These are certainly not scriptural distinctions, but they serve the purpose of bridging the gap between other denominations and finding a false peace amidst doctrinal differences even in the same church. The idea is that you can have unity with people as long as they confess that salvation is by grace alone, but it does not matter what they say or believe about who God is or what he reveals in his word. But the members of Byron Center church sucked this idea out of their own thumbs. Faith’s objective content is all the doctrine that God revealed in his word, all that is confessional and scriptural. They simply assert their distinctions without proving them.

Toward the end of the discussion paper, there is a section listing various errors with instructions to label which ones are absolute doctrines. The errors included theistic evolution, rejecting predestination/reprobation, common grace, adult vs. infant baptism, divorce and remarriage, and pre/post-millennialism. I assume some of these are included to be labeled as conviction or opinion doctrines. Whatever may have been the label of each error, God very clearly reveals in his word the truth about these errors. God is not unclear in his revelation of any of these doctrines.

This discussion paper, along with the retort to a doctrinal difference that “it is not a salvation issue,” completely misses the point. You get these types of discussions and questions when man thinks that he is the main point and center of everything. It reveals a carnal spirit in the realm of religious piety in that man thinks his salvation is the only reason God did anything!

The salvation of sinners is not God’s first purpose with everything. God’s purpose is his own eternal will to glorify himself in the face of Jesus Christ, and salvation for elect sinners is intimately connected with that purpose.

God's purpose is about what God wills and what God reveals. If God did not will salvation but determined to wipe the slate clean and start over when man fell, God would have been absolutely righteous in doing so, and not one thing would have been taken away from him. It is not about man and what man gets out of God. Man does not get to determine which truths that God reveals matter. Man does not get to say that one doctrine that is revealed about God in his word is more important than the rest of God's word. To take God's word and the doctrine revealed therein and to bring it down into the judgment seat of man is to take God himself and bring him into the judgment seat of man. "God, this doctrine is important enough for me to believe, but I will continue to fellowship with one who denies the truth and deems this doctrine inconsequential, even though it dishonors you as the creator, redeemer, and sanctifier." No! God reveals the truth about himself in his word, and true faith holds for truth all that God reveals to us in his word. The unbelieving religious man chooses what doctrines of God are palatable for him like he might choose a piece of fruit from the produce section at the supermarket. This one is too hard; this one is bruised; this one is too large or too small; this has the wrong color; or this one is too smelly. This doctrine is too divisive, makes us too isolated, hinders relations with others too much, makes us seem too judgmental, is too cruel and not nice enough. That is dealing deceitfully with God's word.

Today, doctrine is labelled as cold and divisive. Doctrine is charged as being an idol. Doctrine is considered to be lifeless and bordering on dead orthodoxy. What is more important is the Christian life. The charge comes, "You might have all your doctrine right, but you are unloving and full of pride." But that reveals an ignorance of the Reformed faith, which is consumed with doctrine. If one is ignorant of doctrine, then one is ignorant of the triune God. And what one says that he believes is the manifestation of whether or not that one has true faith. False faith or imitation faith may boast of Christ in word. False faith might put Christ's name on the lips. But that false faith has a different content. Its expression of the truth is different than what God has revealed in his word.

When we are talking about *the faith*, we are speaking about what a man or woman confesses to be the truth about the triune God, Jesus Christ, salvation, man and his sin, and the world. If the doctrinal content of what

one believes does not comport with the scriptures or the Reformed creeds, then one does not have true faith.

Triune God

Faith believes doctrine as that doctrine reveals the triune God. The doctrine that one believes reveals whom one worships. Do you worship the one, living, triune God as he has revealed himself in his word? What kind of God do you believe in? Who is he to you? In whom do you trust and rely?

That is the critical importance of Lord's Day 8, where there is inserted an article in the Heidelberg Catechism on the Trinity before the Catechism's treatment of the Apostles' Creed. The three subjects of Lord's Days 9 through 24 are of God the Father, of God the Son, and of God the Holy Ghost. Therefore, the Catechism is teaching that the knowledge and belief of the Christian faith is the knowledge and belief of God himself in the Trinity.

The Christian faith in its entirety is nothing else than the truth of the triune God. When studying the truths of the Christian faith, we are taught about creation, providence, Christ, salvation, the Spirit, and the resurrection. We are studying nothing else than the doctrine of the triune God. All of these truths reveal something about the triune God.

The corruption of the Christian faith in any respect is a corruption of the doctrine of the triune God himself. That is the seriousness of false doctrine. If a man corrupts the Christian faith in some respect, then in essence that man denies the doctrine of the Trinity.

To corrupt the doctrine of creation is to corrupt the knowledge of God the Father and our creation. Theistic evolution teaches that the world did not come into existence by God the Father as our creator. Theistic evolution denies God's six-literal-day creation week and asserts that all things came about by chance and evolutionary process. The god of theistic evolution is an idol. That god is routinely taught in Christian colleges and off most pulpits in churches today. God the Father created in six, literal, 24-hour days; and in his providence he governs and upholds all things, including the actions of ungodly man. The triune God framed all things by the breath of his word, and faith believes that. To deny creation is to deny the triune God.

What of the god of the well-meant offer, which teaches that God desires the salvation of all men but that

To take God's word and the doctrine revealed therein and to bring it down into the judgment seat of man is to take God himself and bring him into the judgment seat of man.

salvation is dependent upon the condition of faith and man's believing? In the well-meant offer, God has two conflicting wills. He has one will for all men, and he has one will for only the elect. That god of the well-meant offer is not the one, simple, harmonious being—God—but that god is an idol god as dead as Baal. You might as well make a golden calf and set it on the mantle in your living room and prostrate yourself before it if you believe in the well-meant offer. There is no difference between the two gods. The Father eternally decreed to send his Son to die for his elect people, and the Spirit infallibly, irresistibly, efficaciously realizes God's promise to deliver his people from their sins. To hold to the well-meant offer is to deny the triune God.

Or what of the god who depends in some sense on what man does? The god that must first wait upon man before he can save man. Man must first believe or repent, and then that god saves him. That god is an idol god. That doctrine ungodly the triune God. It makes man sovereign in salvation and not God. That is the reason the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) can state in no uncertain terms that the god of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) is an idol. The God of the Christian faith is the God of redemption and sanctification. God the Son is our redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit is our sanctifier. God depends upon no man. To deny sovereign grace is to deny the triune God.

All doctrine says something about the God in whom you believe. If you teach and believe conditions and prerequisites and blessings in the way of obedience in the covenant, that says something about the God you worship. The covenant of grace in Christ with his elect people is God's eternal will to reveal a covenant outside himself. If the covenant in its experience depends upon man, so also God in his own triune life must depend upon something God is doing to have and experience fellowship in himself. That false doctrine teaches that God is a God who has stipulations in his own triune life. God's covenant life with us must follow his own covenant life. So to teach that a child of God must do something before he experiences God's covenant is to teach that the Father presses himself into the Son, and the Son presses himself into the Father's bosom, and the Son only experiences and enjoys that fellowship in the way of his pressing himself into the Father. The Son has to fulfill a condition or a prerequisite before he can enjoy or have possession of the Father's love.

Blasphemy!

The true, living, triune God reveals himself as the God of unconditional covenant fellowship and warm, intimate communion within himself. He reveals his covenant in Jesus Christ to be of warm, unconditional love that is not in any way dependent on the sinner and his activities. We

have and experience the covenant by faith alone, which is not a working. We teach that as the covenant is patterned after God's own triune, covenant life. To deny unconditional covenant fellowship is to deny the triune God.

And we ought to say a few words about ecumenical relationships apart from unity in doctrine. That also reveals something about the God one worships. God in his being is the one who has complete harmony without conflict. We use the term that he is the *simple* God, meaning that God is his perfections and that all his perfections are one in him. God does not merely possess his perfections, but he *is* his perfections. He is love. He is righteousness. He is grace. He is mercy. And all those perfections are one in him without conflict. The ecumenical movement makes the virtues of God conflict. False ecumenism highlights one of God's virtues—love—over against the others. God is love; that is true. But promoters of this movement elevate that virtue above God's more strict virtues, such as his righteousness. When churches do that, they are revealing that they do not worship a righteous God who has eyes purer than to behold iniquity. By linking arms with a church that holds to, teaches, or tolerates theistic evolution, the well-meant offer, or the conditional covenant, a church says, "My God is a God who tolerates sin and false doctrine."

Within God's one being the three persons of the Trinity live an eternally complete and infinitely blessed life. All three persons possess that one being and all of God's perfections. And to deny God's righteousness and to extol only his love is to deny the oneness of God in his own triune life. And then all you have is an idol god that you worship. All the doctrine that we confess reveals in what God we believe. Do you believe in the triune and living God, or do you believe in a dead idol?

One Faith

There is one doctrine or one faith of the church of all ages. And the implication is that a church either has the truth or a church does not have the truth. That is the teaching of Ephesians 4:4–6:

4. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
5. One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
6. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

There is one universal body of Jesus Christ from all ages and from all tribes, tongues, nations, and people. There is one Spirit of Jesus who fills that one body with all of Christ's blessedness. There is only one hope of your calling. There is one Jesus Christ. There is one doctrine of

the church of Jesus Christ. There is one baptism by which we are buried with Christ and raised to newness of life. There is one triune God who is above all and through all and in you all.

The faith is called the “one” faith. There are not multiple faiths or multiple beliefs or multiple doctrines of the one God. There is not pluriformity of faith, but faith’s doctrinal content has always been the same since the beginning of the world in the garden of Eden.

Yet it is often presented that every church has varying degrees of the truth. This church has only a little corruption of the truth, and that one has a lot of corruption. Rome is very bad, of course; but the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Church, and the Protestant Reformed Churches are not so bad and maybe even are pretty good still. One says, “There is no perfect church!” But the question is not whether a church is perfect or not. I can tell you that there are sinners in the church and that every sin under the sun can be found in the church because we all have a stinking, rotten flesh that hates God and the neighbor.

But the one truth is that which God in principle revealed in Genesis 3:15, which promise God published to the patriarchs and the prophets, represented by the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law, and lastly fulfilled in his only-begotten Son. Does the church to which you are joined confess that one truth that God revealed? I believe that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. He leads his church into all truth, and to say that there is no perfect church denies that the Holy Spirit is the power of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, who rules over his church in grace, pours out his Spirit into and on his church that we might understand the doctrine of the word of God and the one message of scripture. And that one body of Christ, chosen to everlasting life, agrees in true faith. The church of all ages agrees in the one faith and doctrine of the word.

The universal church serves one God. There is one truth and doctrine that the church believes. If one does not serve that one living God as God is revealed, then he worships an idol. It does not matter how nice of a person, how good, and how loving someone might be. What does one believe about God? To what doctrine does one hold? I may examine someone’s doctrine to see if I am one with him.

Conclusion

Now let us finish off and put in the grave for good that sinister response to being confronted with the truth: “It is not a salvation issue.” It is this retreat that unbelief tries to find refuge in after being confronted with the truth of God’s word and after being admonished in the doctrine of the word and of the Reformed confessions. Do you see what a foolish response this is? Do you see the ignorance that oozes from this response? When someone says, “It is not a salvation issue,” he means, “Doctrine does not matter. It never has mattered, and it does not matter now. Now leave me alone to serve my idol that I have fashioned according to my own flesh.” That is dealing deceitfully with God and his word. What that response reveals is a complete ignorance of the Reformed faith and ignorance about God revealed in Jesus Christ. It is a manifestation of unbelief and that one does not have true faith, because faith believes the one doctrine contained in the word of God. One who

truly loves the Lord Jesus Christ believes his word, receives that word unconditionally, and submits to the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith does not ask whether I can know God. Over against doubt—doubt is not a pious virtue—true faith says, “I know my God!” That knowledge is seated in the heart of the regenerated

believer. A regenerated, elect child of God, filled with the one Spirit of truth will not persist in the lie about God unto destruction. Therefore, if you cleave to the lie, I can and will tell you that you do not have true faith. Repent for your unbelief. Believe in God as he has revealed himself in his word. He is the God of unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace. He saves totally depraved sinners by the power of his grace alone at the cross of Jesus Christ. By the power of the Spirit, God brings into his elect child’s consciousness the possession of all the salvation God has eternally determined. God certainly preserves his people to the end in spite of themselves. Believe the whole and entire word of God as the revelation of the triune God, who has willed to glorify himself in all things. That God is my God, and that God is the God of the Reformed Protestant Churches. “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

—TDO

If the doctrinal content of what one believes does not comport with the scriptures or the Reformed creeds, then one does not have true faith.

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

WHAT HAPPENED AT ZION? (2): WRESTING

Unbelief's Wrestling of God's Sovereignty

Unbelief always wrests the truth of God's sovereignty in salvation. To wrest means to *pull, force, or move by violent wringing or twisting movements*. "Wrest" is the term used by Canons of Dordt 1.6:

That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, *For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world* (Acts 15:18). *Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will* (Eph. 1:11). According to which decree He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, **which, though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction**, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 156, emphasis in bold added)

"Wrest"—this term pertains to the actions of those who do not believe in God's sovereignty. "Wrest"—this term is as descriptive as it is accurate. Unbelief reckons the truth of God's sovereignty as a noxious plant. And as a gardener seizes the base of a weed to uproot it from the soil with forceful tugs and violent twists, so unbelief tries to rip the truth of God's sovereignty from the bosom of the Reformed church. Being perverse, impure, and unstable in mind, unbelief assaults the doctrine relentlessly. Unbelief hurls all sorts of accusations against the doctrine. Unbelief distorts the doctrine to make it appear foolish and worthy of contempt. Unbelief attempts to heap shame upon faith, which cleaves to this doctrine.

And where the truth of God's sovereignty is faithfully taught and preached, there will always be wresting.

Indeed, God's sovereignty in salvation must be preached. As Canons 1.14 teaches, those whom God sends as messengers of the most joyful tidings of the gospel must preach the truth of divine election:

As the doctrine of divine election by the most wise counsel of God was declared by the prophets, by Christ Himself, and by the apostles, and is clearly revealed in the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, so it is still to be published in due time and place in the church of God, for which it was peculiarly designed. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 158)

And when the decree of election is preached, the messenger of the most joyful tidings of the gospel may never avoid the doctrine of reprobation. Reprobation always serves election just as chaff always serves the wheat. The Canons teaches this as well. Having established in Canons 1.14 that divine election must be preached, Canons 1.15 continues:

What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal election of God. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 158)

Those who are not elect are "passed by." Those who are not elect are passed by *with the grace of election*. But lest we ill conceive of reprobation as a mere *passing by*, the Canons 1.15 goes on to affirm that reprobation is a definite decree of God and an eternal appointment to destruction:

Whom [that is, those "passed by in the eternal election of God"] God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but leaving

them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 158)

And this must be preached!

God will have his decree preached, for, first, this truth serves for the glory of his name. Though an entire church and though the whole world clamor against such preaching, those messengers whom God sends to proclaim the joyful tidings of the gospel must preach God's divine decree because they are ministers for the glory of God's name. Preaching that is not decretal is preaching that does not serve the glory of the sovereign God.

Furthermore, God will have the decree preached because God "peculiarly designed" the preaching of God's sovereignty in salvation for the sake of his people. "The doctrine of divine election... is still to be published in due time and place in the church of God, for which it was peculiarly designed" (Canons 1.14). Does anyone believe this yet today? God *designed*. God *peculiarly* designed. God peculiarly designed the *preaching of his decree* for the sake of his beloved church. As he constituted the church by the decree, as he determined the church to be the gathering of believers and their seed by the decree, and as he gathers his church in time into the institute according to the decree, so God will have the decree of divine election preached to his church. And this truth of God's decree affords his church "unspeakable consolation" (Canons 1.6). What does God's decree teach his church? This: my salvation and my end are absolutely determined by God and fixed by the living decree of God. How can anything separate me from the love of God? Election preaching is consolatory preaching.

And Canons 1.13 describes the believer's response to the sense and certainty of election that comes by means of the preaching thus:

The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before Him, for adoring the depth of His mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him, who first manifested so great love towards them. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 157)

And when reprobation is preached as that which serves election, this truth only instills greater adoration of the mercy of God, who chose a people merely of his good pleasure.

But unbelief wrests. That is what unbelief did in John 6.

In John 6 Jesus Christ declared that he is the bread that the living Father sent from heaven. Jesus Christ is *the* living bread, so that all who eat him shall live. "I am the

living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51). Just as perishable bread sustains and nourishes an earthly and perishing existence, so Christ's flesh and blood are the meat and drink that God has eternally appointed to sustain and nourish a new and everlasting life that is begotten from above. A man who does not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood has no life in him. But whoever eats Christ's flesh and drinks his blood will be raised up in the last day.

Most joyful tidings of the gospel!

But many of Jesus' disciples who heard those tidings murmured and scoffed at his doctrine. They strove among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). They threw up their hands and exclaimed, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" (v. 60). The day prior, the same disciples had swarmed the Lord Jesus Christ to be healed of their diseases and to witness his great miracles. In their presence the Lord had distributed five barley loaves and two small fishes to five thousand men and had gathered up twelve baskets full of fragments. Having their bellies stuffed with bread and fish, those disciples had rejoiced within themselves. Ecstatic in spirit and with uplifted countenances, their mouths had bubbled over with good things to say about the Lord: "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world! Let us make him our king! This is the rule and kingdom that we need!" But the following day those disciples suddenly turned against Jesus. Contradicting every point of the Lord's sermon that he had preached in the synagogue of Capernaum, they quickly left him and walked no more with him.

Why?

If one makes a cursory reading of John 6, he might wrongly conclude that those disciples were simply confused by Jesus' speech and could not quite grasp what he had taught them. Were they not initially interested in a bread that endures unto eternal life? Did they not say, "Lord, evermore give us this bread" (John 6:34)? Perhaps the reason they went back and walked no more with the Lord was because his words were too mysterious and too deep. When they became frustrated and strove among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" was it because Christ had taught them in dark parables and in utterances too deep?

Nay! Christ spoke in such simple doctrine that even a child could have understood.

Then why?

Because in John 6 Jesus Christ also declared that God absolutely determines which souls are truly fed by the Lord's body and blood. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in

no wise cast out. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:37, 44). Truly, whoso eats the Lord’s flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life. Truly, whoso eats his flesh and drinks his blood dwells in Christ and Christ in him. But not all have everlasting life! Not all dwell in Christ and Christ in them! Why? Because the Father does not draw all to his Son. The Father does not give all the gift of faith. Whoever comes to Christ rests *entirely* on the Father’s will, and that proceeds from God’s eternal decree.

It was especially the doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty to save some and to reject others that infuriated many of Jesus’ disciples. And you must understand that when they strove among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” and when they said, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?”—these were not honest words. They lied. They understood Christ’s doctrine *perfectly*. Their lying speech was, first, a cloak for their own unbelief. To conceal their own perverse and impure and unstable minds, they blamed the Lord for preaching a foolish and stupid sermon. But their lying speech was also a wresting of Christ’s doctrine because they hated it. They hated God’s absolute freedom and sovereignty to determine who partakes of the heavenly meat and drink.

This wresting of the truth of God’s sovereignty was what the Synod of Dordt encountered in its strong defense of God’s decree. And this wresting of the decree was what Zion Reformed Protestant Church encountered a few months ago at the hands of Mr. Nick Meelker.

On December 13, 2023, Mr. Meelker sent a letter to the congregation of Zion Reformed Protestant Church, wherein he listed his grievances with the preaching at Zion and requested that the membership papers of his family to be sent to his home. His letter and the history lying behind this letter were presented last time.¹ Last time I also asserted that Mr. Meelker’s letter was nothing but a cloak for his own unbelief. Mr. Meelker does not believe the truth of God’s sovereign decree of reprobation. He wrests it. He wrests it out of unbelief. He wrests it out of a perverse and an impure and unstable mind.

Now I will begin to prove it.

Mr. Meelker’s Wresting of Scripture’s Language

In his letter Mr. Meelker makes the following assertion:

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.

According to Mr. Meelker, it is this view that was the source for division in Zion Reformed Protestant Church.

In this connection he makes specific references to “dogs and pigs” and to “feral pigs who you mow down with a machine gun from a helicopter.” He puts some words in quotation marks to show that he is drawing them from a specific source. Though Mr. Meelker does not state his source explicitly, what he has in mind is a sermon series on 2 Peter that I began when I took up my labors in Zion. Since Mr. Meelker makes reference to these sermons to support his assertions, certainly the sermons themselves must justify his claims! Anything else would be wholly dishonest—lying speech.

But what exactly did I preach?

When Mr. Meelker refers to “feral pigs who you mow down with a machine gun from a helicopter,” he is referring to a sermon on 2 Peter 2:10–16 that was preached on September 8, 2023.² Let us see what scripture says:

10. But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.
11. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.
12. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption. (2 Pet. 2:10–12)

1 Luke Bomers, “What Happened at Zion,” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 11 (March 2024): 23–26.

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

“Natural brute beasts”—this is what the *Spirit* uses as an analogy for those false teachers, who privily sneak their damnable heresies into the church, who cause the way of truth to be mocked, and who lead many astray into perdition. Such reprobate men are like irrational animals whose physical state is “made to be taken and destroyed.” In other words, the false teachers are beasts whose only purpose for existence is to be captured and slaughtered. They are born *to perish*—that is their sole utility in this present age, according to God’s sovereign decree. That is what God said in eternity about these false teachers, and that is who they are when these arise in the church.

And what is a more fitting illustration of this reality than feral hogs? Being one of the most destructive, invasive species in the United States—tearing up crops and trashing property and spreading disease to livestock—such brute beasts are born to perish. These feral hogs are of such a nuisance that Texas, for instance, has legalized helicopter hog hunting to curb their devastation. Such is the picture that scripture paints when describing reprobate teachers *in the church*, the true church of Jesus Christ.

For the apostle says in 2 Peter 2:1, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” These are teachers who arise “among you.” Peter does not have in mind some vague and faceless men who preach in a church around the corner that you will never attend. Peter is speaking about teachers whose names you know. Peter is speaking about teachers who arise in your midst and preach off the pulpit in your church. Peter refers to every minister who comes in the name of Christ but privily brings in damnable heresies.

Heresies are divergent and self-willed opinions about the fundamental doctrines of the church. A heresy would be that which conflicts with our three forms of unity. A heresy would be that which compromises the unconditional covenant. A heresy would be that which undermines and displaces the perfect work of Jesus Christ on the cross. And when the apostle calls them “damnable” heresies, he is not classifying heresies into different categories. He is not saying that there are some not so bad heresies, some worse heresies, and some damnable heresies. No, all heresy is damnable! Heresies are damnable because they have their beginning and end in hell. Heresies are damnable because they are invented and devised by Satan himself for the purpose of destruction.

And such damnable heresies are privily brought into your midst by the crafty stratagems of the enemy. The false teacher does not barge into the church with guns

blazing. No, under the color of true doctrine, he speaks. He brings his heresies alongside the truth to make them as appetizing as possible. He uses the words with which you are familiar. Having grown up alongside you, he was catechized as you were. He was taught distinctive doctrine as you were. In this light the false teachers of today are much craftier than the false teachers of old. You are not dealing with the language of Arius or the language of Pelagius—ancient heretics. You are not dealing with the language of the Remonstrants. You are not dealing with the language of a hundred or even fifty years ago. These false teachers have been taught what language is no good. These false teachers have been taught that the covenant is unconditional in all its aspects, so you will not hear them use the term *conditions*. You will hear new language, such as in a certain, vital sense of the experience of the covenant, man is first. These false teachers have been taught that salvation is absolutely by faith alone and not at all by works, so you will not hear of works that are necessary for salvation. You will hear new language, such as “fruitful faith” or “active faith.” The false teacher has been taught that Christ crucified is the sole ground and foundation for your salvation. He will not deny that. But he will preach in such a way that you are left with the impression that if you would be saved, there is something that you must do. Or, perhaps, you do not hear anything specific in his sermons that seems objectionable, but subtly he disparages sovereign election and reprobation. He never brings them up as that which is absolutely determinative of every aspect of salvation.

And that the false teacher privily brings in these heresies also means that he integrates them into his preaching bit by bit. You get a taste, just a little taste. And, oh, how good it is! He gives you that initial shot of heroin—just a little dose—and you will quickly come back for more. Satan will bide his time. He is content waiting years if he must. He is like that snapping turtle that hides itself in the bottom of a pond with its wiggling tongue as bait, slowly luring the fish into its crushing bite. And for such evil service, Satan sends his evil messengers into the church.

Who are these false teachers then? Natural brute beasts! Irrational animals made to be taken and destroyed! That is what the Spirit calls them. And I am compelled to add that when in my sermon I drew the analogy between these false teachers and feral pigs that you shoot from a helicopter, I actually did a dishonor to the hogs!

That is what I preached to Zion Reformed Protestant Church about “feral pigs who you mow down with a machine gun from a helicopter.”

Is that what Mr. Meelker reflects in his letter?

Furthermore, when Mr. Meelker makes reference to “dogs and pigs,” he is quoting from a sermon on 2 Peter

2:20–22 that was preached on October 1, 2023.³ Let us see what scripture says:

20. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.
21. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.
22. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. (2 Pet. 2:20–22)

“The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire”—this is the proverb that the *Spirit* uses to describe those who, after having received full knowledge of the gospel of Christ, are enticed by the carnal doctrines of false teachers and depart from the truth into the filth of the world. The apostle describes reprobation in the church and sphere of the covenant.

The apostle speaks specifically of those who have heard the pure preaching of the word. They were reprovved and rebuked and exhorted with all longsuffering and doctrine. To them was delivered “the holy commandment”—namely, the gospel and its command that all repent and believe. They were clearly instructed in the doctrine of “the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” who is the “way of righteousness.” In the text Peter does not use the full name “the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” without purpose. The people to whom Peter refers are those who understand the significance of that name. They know that Jesus is Jehovah salvation, God come in the flesh in the perfect form necessary to save man. They know that Jesus does not merely acquire salvation, but he *is* salvation. They know that as the Christ, he is God’s anointed servant and the only one authorized and equipped by God to bring God’s everlasting covenant to perfection. They know that he is Lord over his church by his rule of pure grace, worthy of all praise and loving service. There is not any question in their minds what the gospel is. And as the epistoler to the Hebrews says, “Those who were once enlightened... have *tasted* of the heavenly gift” (Heb. 6:4, emphasis added). They have perceived to a certain degree the glory of God’s kingdom and what are the rich blessings of that kingdom.

Again, these people are not some vague no-names whom you have never met in your life. These are people

with whom you grew up. You delight to spend time with them. You rejoice in their confessions and the joy they manifest under the preaching of the gospel. You meet with them at the Lord’s table. They are, by all outward appearances, those who have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who know the way of righteousness, and who receive the holy commandment delivered to them, for they are members of your church.

But they have no faith. They were never given the faith that proceeds from God’s eternal decree because God did not will it. Instead, they have what scripture and the creeds call a vain faith. It mimics faith for a time. It exhibits joy and wonder and astonishment at the gospel for a time. But it is nothing more than religious excitement or pious feelings or a stirring of the emotions. There are many who, for whatever reason—the Lord knows—receive the gospel with great zeal for a time. But it does not last. It cannot last, for this mimicry of faith has no root. Its root goes no deeper than the flesh of men, and in flesh there is no endurance but only vanity. This mimicry of faith has no root in Christ, no deep, living connection with him. And if faith has anything other than Christ or anything more than Christ, it is not true faith. True faith does not rest in anything other than Christ.

And there is no faith because there is no indwelling Spirit. Men may certainly give an outward show of reform. They adapt their lives to what they hear. They play the role of a church person very well. But where there is no Spirit, there is no love for Christ and his truth. They never had it spiritually.

And in due time they are again entangled with the pollutions of the world.

These people develop an itch in their ears that needs to be scratched. Their flesh is not satisfied with the ministry of Christ’s servants. The lusts of their flesh need a good scratching. So they depart and heap to themselves teachers, teachers who teach them the goodness of men; teachers who give them leniency in their covetous desires; teachers who will not teach sound doctrine or give reproofs or rebukes or exhortations. And there are *heaps* of such teachers. When such teachers come into contact with these people and are agreeable to their own private sentiments and carnal minds, they join hands and depart together and entangle themselves in the world again.

What has happened?

God has manifested them. Behind all departure from the gospel stands the eternal purpose of God. God has confronted them with his Son, so that they must do something with him. What will you do with him? When

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

God draws them out of error, it is to set them in slippery places. They could have lived and died in obscure darkness. But now their sin has been revealed in a most horrible way. When Christ comes by his gospel, he brings them out in the open, so that they have no covering left. They are like seeds in the soil, but when the rain comes, they must bring forth the thorns and thistles of reprobation rather than the fruit of election. That rain becomes a savor of death unto death. By the same gospel one is blessed and the other is cursed. That preaching is the revelation of the heart of men and the revelation of God's eternal thoughts toward men.

And by their departures into the world of corruption, these people reject the Lord and savior, Jesus Christ; crucify him afresh; and become antichristian. They kill him again, for they despise his teachings and admonitions and warnings. They reject his rule and discipline in the church. They condemn Jesus Christ as a criminal. They show that they despise the blood of his satisfaction to God, and by their departures they manifest that they want no part in his cross. By their public actions they put Christ once again to open shame and mock him openly.

There is no wickedness like that of those who have been in a true church and who have left in hatred of the truth. It is a wickedness that paves the world for antichrist. A man may purge his house with an outward reform of confession and life; he may garnish his house with all sorts of works that seem agreeable to the gospel, but then a devil comes and finds his house empty and devoid of Christ and the Spirit. And that devil goes and finds seven other devils more wicked than himself. Those who depart from the gospel become more wicked than they ever were before. They develop an extreme aversion to the truth, mocking it and ridiculing it to anyone who gives them an ear. And like the Jewish nation at the time of Christ's crucifixion, they call for Christ's head while honoring thieves and murderers like Barabbas.

And they are overcome. Such a one who departs from the gospel seldom, if ever, repents. That is what the epistoler of the Hebrews writes:

4. For it is impossible that those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,
5. And have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,
6. If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance. (Heb. 6:4–6)

God has exposed them. God has confronted them with Christ. And God casts them down into destruction with greater condemnation. Having departed from the

knowledge of Jesus Christ, their end is worse than their beginning.

The Spirit calls them “dogs and pigs.” When dogs vomit up their partially digested food and the bile of their stomachs, they almost always try to eat the vomit again. When the manure-mud is washed off pigs, they will certainly plop themselves right back into the mire. So too those who depart from the gospel return to the corruption of this present world.

That is what I preached to Zion Reformed Protestant Church about “dogs and pigs.”

Is that what Mr. Meelker reflects in his letter? When Mr. Meelker makes specific references to these sermons in his letter, does he do justice *at all* to what was preached?

He does not.

But why would a man do such an injustice to the preaching? Was it merely a mistake? Did he not fully understand what was preached? Did he, perhaps, need some more instruction? No! The preaching of God's sovereignty to appoint some unto salvation and others unto damnation as it lives on the pages of Peter's second epistle was made abundantly clear—so clear that a child could understand.

The use—the *abuse*—of these texts in the letter only serves Mr. Meelker's purpose to make the preaching of God's absolute sovereignty in salvation appear as despicable and as foolish and as stupid as possible. It is a cloak for his own unbelief. It is also a wresting.

For when the doctrine of God's decree is preached, the believer marvels! Standing beneath the awesomeness of God's sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, the believer exclaims, “Who is sufficient for these things!” The gospel commends to his soul the eternal and unmerited grace of election. It humbles him to the dust, for in himself he has no right to election. But the believer understands that *merely* of God's good pleasure and for Christ's sake, the elect are delivered out of the world of corruption, secured from the destruction of damnable heresies, protected from every wind of false doctrine, preserved by the almighty power of the Spirit, and drawn into the everlasting kingdom of God in heaven. And he marvels!

But Mr. Meelker wrests this language. Mr. Meelker takes the profound and holy words of scripture and so violently twists them, such that they appear perverse and impure. Mr. Meelker disdainfully uses the very language of scripture in his letter out of hatred for the word of God that was faithfully preached to Zion Reformed Protestant Church.

This is the first example of wresting from Mr. Meelker's letter. Two more examples must be explored next time.

—LB

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

A WARRIOR, WHO CAN FIND?

According to the goodwill and sovereign decree of God, he has placed us here in the twenty-first century and specifically in the year of our Lord 2024. We continue to run in time according to the will of God to this very day. We live in a day and an age that can be compared to the days of Sodom and Gomorrah and to the late days of the ancient Roman Empire. All kinds of filth in lifestyles and doctrines are being tolerated and promoted today as they were back then. Not with the eye of flesh but with the eye of faith, one can see Satan working harder and shrewder than he ever has. The devil is ceaselessly working and conjuring up new ways to trap and lure the child of God, to make him to hate his God and to love the devil. The devil wants nothing more than to take the children of God and turn them to his side. Look what is being promoted by the world today: the entertainment industry is advocating for the LGBTQ movement at every turn, making it harder and harder for man to be disgusted by it. The false church is promoting man-centered theology, and a love for man in theology is gaining ground as never before.

These are the times in which we live as a church, and they are not going away. As wickedness increases, there is one worldview that is becoming intolerable and insufferable. The Christian, specifically the Reformed Christian, holds to the worldview that people deem wicked, vile, and hateful. Christians are even looked at with blank stares. One must see that the devil is behind this wicked worldview of hatred for Christianity, and he hates God and his people and will continue to work on his craft of attempting to pluck the sheep from Jesus Christ one by one. That is the devil's objective, and he will not cease. He does this by throwing the church into false doctrine; making sin less offensive, heaven less appealing, and hell less horrific; putting tolerant men into special offices; bombarding the church with distractions; and making the true gospel less urgent. The devil is the spiritual foe of the church of Jesus Christ.

The devil and his host is the army that the church

of Jesus Christ will fight till her members take their last breaths on this earth.

But there remains a truth for the church to take hold of in these dark, last days. Hallelujah! The truth of Jesus Christ, the king. In these last days our sovereign King will provide faithful warriors for these end times, to guide, instruct, and lead the church into the truth until Christ returns. The truth that God will provide these warriors has been evident throughout history, and that truth is seen still today. It is with that promise and comfort that the church need not fear for the end times, because her God is sovereign and is working to gather, preserve, and defend his blood-bought people.

Throughout the entire existence of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC), there has been turmoil and unrest. Controversy seems to be at every turn, dividing the churches and resulting in the losing of friends and members of the churches. The devil is relentlessly attacking our churches from every which way in all forms of evil. This can lead the church of Christ to fall into sin and question God's way or to lack confidence and assurance in the truth. Satan works, and his work has a destructive effect upon the church. He comes like an angel of light and asks, "Does God really say that? Does God really want you to suffer like this, and does God really require that of you?" Until Christ returns Satan will harass the church of Jesus Christ. This is made evident from Genesis 3:15, which reads, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." God says that there will always be strife between you and the world, between you and those of Satan. But today people do not want to hear this verse. They do not want to fight for the truth's sake. Take, for example, the man who claims to be a Christian but who also believes that there can be peace without fighting for the gospel. He will sit in a church, and men will talk about how nice he is and how he has a good word to say about everyone, including the false prophet. He will excuse false doctrine by saying

something like “It is ambiguous” and “He did not mean it.” He will make excuses for that false teacher for all kinds of reasons, but the main reason is that he will not war. He hates war. This man is not a Christian at all. A true Christian, an elect child of God, can never say peace through tolerance of false doctrine even when his flesh rises up against him not to war. He will war. He must war. When God takes his abode in the heart of a believer, the believer must fight. He will fight. It is impossible for him not to fight. The child of God realizes that true peace only comes in the way of fighting and that his battles are not against flesh and blood but against principalities of darkness, against the great red dragon and his hosts. But the child of God fights like none other. He fights with confidence; he knows that he has the victory, not because of himself but in his savior, Jesus Christ. What confidence! What warriors God brings forth in times of deep apostasy in the church according to his sovereign decree of election.

This life is nothing but warfare for the child of God, and there is nothing easy about this life. This life is full of attacks by wolves and the likes of those who lie in wait, quietly seeking about to destroy the souls of God’s people. This life is full of counterfeit doctrines and love-promoting movements in society that present themselves to the church as a most beautiful thing. In the last days the child of God is reminded of what Matthew taught in Matthew 24:24, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” It is in times like these that God graciously provides faithful warriors, men who have unwavering zeal and love for God. It is by the means of such men, whom God raises up to labor in the church, that he protects the sheep. It is these faithful warriors whom God will raise up in his church until Christ comes again. What a blessed comfort for the sheep to know that their Shepherd will always provide men for the times.

How do you know if a denomination or congregation is either reforming or apostatizing? According to Belgic Confession article 29, you look for the marks of the true church. Are those evident in the church you attend or are looking to attend? And one can judge whether a church is true or false almost immediately by hearing what is being preached from the pulpit and by looking at the men in that church, particularly the men who hold office. On the negative side, in today’s day and age, men arrive at a church and look at the men in office, and they look for thoughtful, gentle, and loving men. They do not want troublemakers; they look for men to say nice things to them, to give them a nice little pat on the back, men who they see smiling and laughing in their best suits,

men who like to talk about politics and the sports games that just happened on the weekend. They want the men who so generously give their money to the schools. Overall, they look for men who are just tolerant men. They think to themselves, “I will join myself to that church because these men are truly good men and perfect for the church.” And that is exactly what the devil wants you to believe. That old serpent knows he cannot conquer the truth, nor does he waste his time trying. What he does instead is most clever. The devil’s tactic today is to bombard the churches with these so-called nice men. By placing these nice men in churches, the people immediately are enamored with the men’s personalities and loving gestures. Because of their good reputations, these men are soon nominated to be elders and deacons and leaders of Bible studies. These men are not fighters, and by nature people love men who do not want to fight. In the end no one really knows what these men whom they put into office believe concerning the gospel, nor do they give two thoughts about it because that does not matter to the people. It is all about reputation, the reputation of a peaceful, nice man.

It is a clever trap by the devil, into which many churches fall. The denomination that I left, the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), fell into this trap; and the one I now belong to, the Reformed Protestant Churches, will also fall into this trap if Christ tarries. No one is exempt from the wiles of Satan, who makes you love nice men. When I was a member in the PRC, I did not understand this as I do now. Ever so slowly doctrine became a little less important and the gospel became a little less urgent. Practical preaching and practical living became the center of life and doctrine. Law preaching became all that men knew how to preach. The power of the preaching was gone. Men became indifferent to doctrine, and doctrine was put aside. Men were put into office based on age and if they were kind and if they had not upset the apple cart the last time they were in office. Men soon came under the illusion that doctrine was no longer that important; and if the gospel was something you heard only a few times a year, that was acceptable. In the PRC they do not care what you believe as long as you do not rock the boat and become a troublemaker. Professor Hanks would say that as soon as the boat is rocked, you are immediately looked upon as a schismatic and a troublemaker. They tell you to either stop shaking the boat and be quiet or to just leave.

Last year Prof. Brian Huizinga wrote an article in the *Standard Bearer* titled “My Heart Desires Thy Peace.” The whole article is about why you should desire peace in the upcoming year and the years going ahead. His opening paragraph is as follows:

Peace in the church is fragile and precious. Threats to peace in the church are many and mighty. The call to peace in the church is urgent and necessary.¹

From all appearances this seems like a very noble and beautiful call to the people. Some might think that there is nothing wrong with this. Though nothing is doctrinally wrong with this statement, it nonetheless shows the heart of Professor Huizinga and many others in the PRC. Peace is the only thing that matters to them—not the truth, not the gospel, not even doctrine. They are willing to buy peace at the expense of the truth. Peace is the only thing that they care about. Peace trumps all for them to the exclusion of the gospel. I can prove this because in a seminary convocation address Professor Huizinga said that no one in the PRC is teaching false doctrine. “Though all the ministers are orthodox and all the ministers are members in good standing, there may be sometimes the temptation to start dividing them.”² In the PRC all the ministers are orthodox and have perfect doctrine, according to Professor Huizinga. He says that so peace can remain, no matter the cost. Regardless of what ministers teach, they are to be considered orthodox, because that creates peace in the church.

It has become evident that the PRC sacrificed the truth for peace. However, what is ironic in this all is that the PRC will not deal with doctrine or controversy. Peace can only come through the gospel, warfare, and controversy. Men in the PRC, like Professor Huizinga, have a false understanding of peace. That is why their calls for peace and promotions of peace are so ironic. Peace to them is to have no problems, for everybody to get along, and to have nothing troubling the church. To them that is peace, but that is not peace. Peace is living in Jesus Christ. Peace comes only by the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. That alone is comfort and peace, and that gospel is the only remedy for a troubled heart. The PRC’s solution to promote peace over against warfare and controversy is to attempt to brush the problems under the rug and hope that they never show themselves again. Or they try to gain peace by dealing with their abuse problem by having conferences. Hundreds of people will gather at a conference to gain peace in their churches and be rid of abuse, while only a couple handfuls will gather at a classis meeting to watch what becomes of the doctrine in their church. The members fall over themselves for earthly peace, while the root of their church is rotten to the core. The men of these churches do not want to deal

with doctrine and controversy because that puts them before the face of the living God. “What have you done with my Christ?” is the question that comes from God. And they would rather ask, “What has man done to man in our church?” What worthless warriors! They do not care anymore; they simply want to keep it as “Reformed is enough.” Men like Professor Huizinga will continue to heap their calls of “Peace, peace” in the churches, but peace will never come. The churches might fix the problem of abuse, but they still will not have peace because of the false doctrine on their pulpits. Professor Huizinga and many others stand as cowards because they are unwilling to go to battle for the truth. They will not be warriors for Christ. They can only be warriors for man. They will not so much as touch doctrine or come near to it. And their solution? They cry, “Peace.” They promote love and peace even when peace cannot exist with false doctrine.

So, then, who are the faithful warriors, and how are they characterized? The answer comes in 1 Chronicles 12:32–33. In these verses God gives us a description of men who are warriors in the church.

32. And the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.
33. Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, which could keep rank: they were not of double heart.

These verses characterize the type of men David had in his army when fighting the enemies of Israel. This description of the army of David is a beautiful picture of the army of Jesus Christ today. The church is called the *church militant* because the members of the church fight from the moment they are born till the moment they die. They do not fight physically like this passage is describing, but the picture has significance. The warrior fights his sin, his own flesh, Satan, and the world.

First, the men of the church must have an “understanding of the times.” That means the men of the church must have an understanding of the truth versus the lie. In every way and from every page, there are doctrines that come relentlessly, all professing to be the truth. These warriors, and specifically the elders of the church, need to be able to discern what is the truth and what is the lie. The only way to know what is the truth and what is the lie

1 Brian Huizinga, “My Heart Desires Thy Peace,” *Standard Bearer* 99, no. 7 (January 1, 2023): 149.

2 Brian Huizinga, “The Protestant Reformed Minister Today,” convocation address for the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, given on September 6, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58WYfZPepio>.

is by studying God's word. The men of Berea took that calling to heart, and we find that truth in Acts 17:10–11:

10. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.
11. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Second, these warriors of the church must be like the Bereans, who “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” That is, the Bereans took the word that Paul and Silas had brought and searched and studied the scriptures to see if what Paul and Silas had taught to them was true. These Bereans did not consider reputations; and that is evident because even though Paul and Silas had preached and ministered to them, the Bereans still searched the scriptures to see whether what they had been taught was true. Elders and men of the church may not have respect of persons when it comes to doctrine. Apart from the Spirit, men may fall into false doctrine even if they are considered to be giants in theology. Similar to discerning the truth from the lie, to have an “understanding of the times” also means that these faithful warriors of the church must know what kind of attacks are being made on God's truth. They must know this because they must know “what Israel ought to do.” Men who are ignorant of the truth and the lie cannot protect the sheep from the dangers and false doctrines outside the church. These false doctrines and attacks are what these warriors must fight against constantly, and they must be able to discern what is the lie and what is the truth.

As the world becomes more corrupt, the false doctrines and attacks on the church are becoming more deceiving and deadly. It is for this reason that we need men for the times, who know what Israel ought to do. There is also a warning from Jehovah for those who do not have knowledge nor understand the times, and that is found in Hosea 4:6: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”

Third, the men of the church must be “expert in war.” This is to say, these men must know how to do battle. The men in David's army knew how to use their weapons

and were experts with them. These men trained and trained, day after day, to prepare themselves for battle, so that when the battle came, they were ready. The same principle applies today. The men in the church must be expert in battle; that is, they must know how to use scripture and the creeds in the defense and promotion of the truth. These men must spend time in the word of God, equipping themselves with the weapons of scripture and putting on the “whole armour of God” that they might be able to use their weapons against the foes of the church of Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:11–17). These men must not be afraid to use these weapons either. Elders must not be afraid to use the weapons of scripture when admonishing members of the congregation and when dealing with men who promote and teach false doctrine. Ministers must not be afraid to call out false doctrine on the pulpit and to defend the Reformed faith. These men who are “expert in war” must always be ready to fight for the truth, even unto death. It is in our flesh and human nature to make exceptions for false doctrine and to permit it because we do not want to cause another ruckus in the church or to give up our peaceful lives. These warriors in the church must never put the sword down, but they must always have it drawn, ready to battle for Jesus Christ. Oh, many people will tell these warriors to put their swords away because they keep causing trouble in the church and that they are too harsh and too polemical, but these warriors are not worried about what men say of them. They have a zeal to glorify God in all they do, no matter what men may write and say about them.

A faithful warrior, who can find? These are the men who are so few to find and whom the church of Jesus Christ needs here in this battlefield. I am reminded what Professor Hanks said in his sermon titled “Men for the Times”:

They didn't sit there as happens so often, you know, where one man has the courage to stand up and say, “This is the truth. This is where we must stand.” That they on the sidelines wring their hands and say, “Oh, don't rock the boat, don't rock the boat. What are you trying to do? bring trouble? What are you trying to do? bring unrest and confusion into the church? Don't be so sharp. Don't be so critical. Don't be so condemnatory. We have to live in peace; we have to live in quietness.” And there they stand, harping and criticizing and making a big fuss about it because someone has the spiritual courage to stand up and be counted in the cause of the truth.³

3 Herman Hanks, “Men for the Times,” sermon preached at Hope Protestant Reformed Church on July 9, 1995, <https://www.prc.org/resources/sermons/audio/message/men-for-the-times>.

Is it not true that this is who so many in the churches have become? These men say to the warriors fighting for the truth, “Stop rocking the boat and stop being so condemnatory. Stop nitpicking and being a faultfinder. You are too harsh in your language, and you are so full of hate. You need to put your sword away and live in peace.” The men who bring this charge are afraid to be counted for the cause of the truth. Men like Professor Huizinga are afraid to be counted for the cause of the truth because they are unwilling to fight. They are unwilling to do battle for the cause of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. This charge of rocking the boat and being condemnatory has always come to those who are faithful warriors in the church, and that is the charge that the men of Zebulun drew.

Further, these warriors must be men who are “not of double heart.” This means that when the battle comes, they do not put on all the armor as if they are going to fight and then turn around and drop all their weapons because they are not willing to do battle. We see this often in churches today when men will say that they love the truth and that they are willing to defend God’s truth no matter the cost, but when the lie hits them in the face, they see that the cost of doing battle is too high. And what do they do? They turn around and run the other way. In the Reformed Protestant Churches, we saw that when men resigned from their offices and left the gospel because the suffering became too much to bear. They had lost enough for Christ’s sake; and when God said, “Give up more,” they were not willing. When wars had to be fought and battles had to be won, they were unwilling to fight. They were not willing to give up their lives for Jesus Christ. God has a word for those men: “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 16:25). Those men revealed by their actions that they have a love for earthly things over their love for Jesus Christ. The opposite of those men is the man who is not of a double heart. He is one who has a heart that is fixated upon the glory and majesty of Jehovah God. His heart is buried in the scriptures that he might have an understanding of the times, and he is equipped with the weapons of scripture that he might become an expert in war and that he might have the strength to do battle all the days of his life for the glory and praise of his eternal King.

God will raise up men who are warriors in the church to lead the church even when she is in her darkest days. God will raise up men who know what his church ought to do, and that is our comfort.

These were the characteristics of the men of David’s army, and they ought to be the characteristics today of the men in the church of Jesus Christ. As is evident throughout history, God has raised up warriors who understood the times, who were expert in war, who were not of a double heart: men like Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, George Ophoff, and Herman Hoeksema. And God will continue to raise up men who are willing to do battle.

Yet it is important to remember that not one of those men fought perfectly in God’s army. Not one was a faithful warrior of himself, and no man ever will be. We will often and in many ways fall short and fall into sin and temptation. We will see how utterly corrupt and depraved we are, but God gave unto his church a perfect warrior. Oh, is that not comforting! God gave to his people one who did all perfectly. It is because of that one’s perfect warring that we war today. We rest in knowing that our warring will never be perfect on this side of Jordan, and yet we fight with confidence knowing that Christ earned the victory and gives us the victory by faith in him. What a gift!

God, through the line of generations, continues and will continue to raise up men for the times to lead the church in this dark and late day in history. God will raise up men who are warriors in the church to lead the church even when she is in her darkest days. God will raise up men who know what his church ought to do, and that is our comfort. That comfort does not rest in men or in a man to lead the church, for man is but a weak and sinful creature; but that comfort rests in God alone, who promises to always remember his church for a thousand generations. What a comfort that is for the church! God does not forget his church, and that is evidenced in the raising up of warriors. Men will continue to be raised up to lead God’s people into the green pastures and to keep the wolves and every wind of false doctrine out from among God’s people. Praise be to God for using weak means to fulfill his will.

Often the glory and praise go to these men for what they did and what they accomplished for the work of the church, whether that be sermons, writings, books, or commentaries, but that should not be so. We should give utmost thanks to God for raising up these warriors. Men are but mere creatures of the earth, created from the dust of the earth with no power in themselves. Man is nothing

before God, and that is to be remembered. It is by the Spirit of God alone that those men did what they did for the church. God raised them up for a time and then carried them home as warriors who were faithful because God is faithful. We confess with Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10 the same truth that every reformer of God has confessed: “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

As we run through the last days in history, may we not be as so many churches today and worry that the gospel has lost its appeal, so that we are tempted to soften it. Tempted to make it more attractive to men. Tempted to file off its sharp edges. Tempted to compromise the truth of the gospel. To do so would be to destroy the only weapon that we have in this world of darkness. We

confess with Augustine, “The truth is like a lion. You do not have to defend the truth. Let it loose. The truth will defend itself.” We have the gospel, which is scarcely heard anywhere in the world, and yet, sometimes we are ashamed of it. Often we do not want to war anymore; we want the peace of the false church. Unless God makes us to war for his cause, we would all be worthless warriors. Praise be to God for his faithfulness.

May God graciously continue to raise up warriors for the times, who know what Israel ought to do, that they might lead the church out of false doctrine and into the truth of Jesus Christ and his word, warriors who are able to discern the truth from the lie and who are not afraid to be counted for the cause of the truth of Jesus Christ alone. Only in that way will the true church have peace in Jesus Christ.

—Braylon Mingerink

INSIGHTS

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

BUNGLED

On Sunday, December 24, 2023, many of us peacefully enjoyed Christmas Eve in God’s house as we sat in our pews in the Reformed Protestant Churches. Freely, we were fed with divine sustenance. The Spirit poured out from the preachers. The Spirit in our hearts received the Spirit. Our hungry and thirsty souls were filled with wonderful, spiritual food through the preaching of the gospel. The truth was proclaimed, and we delighted in it. While the themes and texts of all the sermons may have differed across our churches, at the heart of the gospel messages that we received was God’s comforting word to his people: God chose his people from all eternity and so loved us that he sent his Son to be born into the world to save us. Christ fully and

completely accomplished all of our salvation at the cross, leaving nothing left for us to do. Throughout our churches we heard Christ and him crucified. What joy!

It was not so in Faith Protestant Reformed Church on that same sabbath day. That evening Rev. C. Spronk preached a sermon on Lord’s Day 38 that led his sheep upon dark and bewildering pathways, lighted only by the terrible gloom of false doctrine. There was no peaceful enjoyment of the gospel as the members sat in their pews. There could not have been, for in his sermon, “The Blessed Sabbath Day,”¹ Reverend Spronk bungled the law and the gospel so terribly that the perfect work of Christ on the cross was thrown squarely out of the church’s front door, and the people of Faith Protestant Reformed

1 Clayton Spronk, “The Blessed Sabbath Day,” sermon preached in Faith Protestant Reformed Church on December 24, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=12242322705469>.

Church were left struggling under the cruel bondage of the law.

During the scripture reading, Reverend Spronk said this:

We do note that there is a law, a rule, for keeping the sabbath day holy. When we read of the Pharisees' legalism, how they kept rules, one danger is that we respond in a rubber-band way, where we want to snap to the other side and have no rules. Well, the Lord gave us a law, a rule, to be a tool to help us rest, to rest in him.

Then later during the scripture reading, he said,

And notice that it's not only the Pharisees who believe that the sabbath day must be kept lawfully but also the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not deny but he affirms the need to keep the sabbath day lawfully, to obey the fourth commandment.

But the problem, and I'll say that before we read the passage, the problem with the Pharisees was, they didn't see the rule as a tool. They didn't see the rule as a tool for communing with God, for resting in God, believing in God. But they viewed the rule as an end in itself. You keep the rule just to keep the rule, in other words, just to check it off. And then the rule becomes legalistic. There's no spiritual depth or meaning to it. So, on the one hand, we have to be careful [not] to say, "We don't want any rules." Those rules are tools to help us spiritually. On the other hand, we don't want to say, "Well, we have to have rules; we have to keep them," and forget the spiritual reason for the rule.

After listening to his introduction, I very much had the inclination to snap to the other side of whatever kind of strange doctrine Reverend Spronk was teaching. I could not rubber band there fast enough. When he redefined the law, which is a safe and necessary guide to our walk of loving gratitude to God, as a tool for communing with God, resting in God, and believing in God, it became clear that he was up to no good.² When Reverend Spronk then mischaracterized the Pharisees by explaining that the only reason they kept the law was to check boxes and not because they thought that doing the law made them righteous before God, it was apparent that he was setting the stage for a great confusion of the law and the gospel. Something was amiss, and a new and strange doctrine was being introduced, as if Christ himself were affirming

it. In time Reverend Spronk revealed the purpose for his alarming introduction when he came to the third point of the sermon and said:

Now on that first day, beloved, there is a law. There is. Six days shalt thou labor; seventh day, rest. We don't want to be legalistic, so you may be thinking, "Let's be careful here, not make a list of rules." Well, beloved, do not do what the Pharisees did and say, "There's a fourth commandment, and now what we need to do is we need to make a whole pile of rules for the sabbath day, and then check them off. And then if you've done these things, you've kept the sabbath day."

No, we need to remember that the purpose of those rules is so that we will commune with God, so that we will confess that we believe that he is the God who made the world, so that we will confess that we believe he's the God of Jesus Christ, who has delivered us from our sins, and we want to rest in that.

And don't, *don't* [emphasis his] too quickly throw out all the rules. If the rule has become empty, whatever rule that may be—you have to be in church on Sunday twice. If that has become empty because you come to church and while you're here you don't commune with God, you don't really soak in his word and embrace salvation in Jesus Christ, then the solution for you is not to give up the rule—I'm not going to go to church anymore on Sunday—but quit making the rule just an outward thing. Use the rule as the means that it's intended for, to be for your spiritual benefit, so that you may spiritually commune with God.

By using the conditional language "so that," Reverend Spronk taught in the quotation above that in order for you to receive communion with God, and in order for you to confess that you believe, you have to make rules—not just regular, empty rules but fancier rules that are inwardly spiritually beneficial. Further, he taught that these rules are the means whereby we embrace salvation in Jesus Christ. If that does not make you rubber band the other direction, I do not know what will. By these teachings Reverend Spronk truly confused the law and the gospel and did great evil against Lord's Day 23, Belgic Confession article 22, and Canons of Dordt 5.4, along with many other articles in the Reformed confessions. Essentially, Reverend Spronk put the law in place

² See Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 3:117.

of Christ and the cross. A person does not need Christ anymore as the way to the Father because the person has rules that will bring him to the Father. A person does not need the gift of true faith to embrace salvation; the law will do. A person does not need a covenant God to lovingly draw him into blessed communion, the person's law-keeping will obtain God's favor and fellowship. And in so doing Reverend Spronk asked of his congregation to do that which is an absolute impossibility. He asked them to accomplish their own salvation and told them that Christ is no longer necessary. Reverend Spronk failed to remember that according to Lord's Days 2 through 5, no one could ever make enough rules to fulfill the law of God perfectly, "so that" one could be received into God's favor—no one except Jesus Christ, the only perfect one. Reverend Spronk forgot that because of our sinful human natures, we only daily increase our debts. But Reverend Spronk did not forget about our natures altogether, for he had something to say about them that apparently solves the issue. Next he presented this:

And now you can apply that to many other things in your life on the sabbath day. Now I know that coming to church is going to be different from many of the other rules that you might have on the Lord's day, and many a debate can be had in the back of church or at a Bible study. May you do homework on Sunday or not? Are there certain kinds of cooking methods you may use on Sunday or not? May you watch anything or listen to anything on Sunday or not? And it's interesting that some of us may have a hard and fast rule about not using TVs on Sunday, but I wonder how many of us maybe could benefit from a rule: you're not going to use a smartphone or a tablet or be on the internet or social media on Sunday.

Now I'm touching on many things, beloved, where we might have some disagreements here in the congregation and in our families [about] how are we going to implement the fourth commandment? But in order to say, "Here is the way of wisdom!" don't make rules for the sake of rules that don't mean anything but appreciate the role that rules can play to help you really keep the

Reverend Spronk bungled the law and the gospel so terribly that the perfect work of Christ on the cross was thrown squarely out of the church's front door, and the people of Faith Protestant Reformed Church were left struggling under the cruel bondage of the law.

sabbath day, to rest in the perfect work of Jesus Christ and in peace with God.

So just take for example, the smartphone. My wife and children can tell you that I don't have a rule for myself or for them that you may not use your phone at all on Sunday. But when I think about it, beloved, a rule might be very helpful to me. You see, it's not natural for us, it's not natural for us after the fall into sin, to want to rest on the Lord's day, to meditate upon spiritual things and to enter into spiritual communion with God. It takes discipline. And what I'm suggesting, beloved, is that maybe in reaction to legalism—which we don't want any legalism, perhaps we've become too licentious, demanding too much

freedom—that it may be good for us and for our children and young people to have some discipline, making a rule—making a rule not to be a Pharisee, making a rule not to be harsh on you, making a rule because we really pray, and we really hope that this rule will be a tool that will help you not to waste this day but to use it to really commune with God in the good news of Jesus Christ, that we may rest not only today but—well that rat race is going

to start tomorrow. Well, we have Christmas day tomorrow, maybe not—Tuesday. But be able to begin our work in this world in the faith and in the salvation we have in Jesus Christ and say, "I'm not part of the rat race anymore; I have rest and peace with my God."

What, as maintained by Reverend Spronk, is the solution to overcoming our totally depraved human natures that do not want to rest on Sunday in order to enter into spiritual communion with God? What is the way in which we really soak in the word and embrace our salvation in Jesus Christ despite our utter sinfulness? He stated, "It takes discipline." And then later, he said, "To have some discipline, making a rule." As taught by Reverend Spronk, the way in which we enter into blessed communion with the Father is not by faith but by our diligent obedience to the law, or discipline. Therein is his great confusion and bungling of the law and the gospel. He put the law as a condition on salvation and then made the

law “really” attainable, if we obey it rigorously enough. Consequently, he lifted man up in sinful pride, leaving no room for grace. He did not even bother to mention “by grace” in the sermon. He tossed Christ out like an unclean thing and left his sheep under the law without an escape. He overlooked the Reformed confessions, which teach that no amount of following of rules—no matter how many are made, and no matter how disciplined a person becomes in following them—will ever be enough for complete satisfaction for sin.

In his explanation of Lord’s Day 5, Herman Hoeksema wrote,

God will have His justice satisfied! Somehow we must make satisfaction, full satisfaction of the justice of God. Yes, but this means that we can never escape the punishment of sin, for to make satisfaction implies that the punishment be endured to the end. And again, this also implies that on the sinner’s side the way is closed forever. He cannot make this full satisfaction. We cannot even see a possible way of escape. If salvation is to come to us, it must come from above, and it must come in the way of a wonder of grace. The way of escape, if there be any, belongs to those things which eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard, and that have never arisen in the heart of man. It must be opened by Him Who quickeneth the dead, and Who calleth the things that are not as if they were. Salvation does not lie within the scope of humanly conceivable possibilities. And this we must learn to acknowledge, not only as a matter of doctrine, but in true, heartfelt humiliation. We must indeed become nothing; Christ, the revelation of the wonder of God’s grace, must become all. We must come to the hearty confession that with us the way of escape is impossible, and that all our works and efforts, all our wisdom and philosophy, even all our piety and religiousness, mean absolutely nothing and are of no value whatever as far as obtaining again the favor of God is concerned. All boasting must be excluded. No flesh must glory in the presence of God. We must cast

ourselves unconditionally upon Him Who alone doeth wondrous things.³

The Lord has a word for Reverend Spronk and for all those who maintain the doctrines that are taught in “The Blessed Sabbath Day.” Repent and hear God’s word. The voice of Jehovah thunders from heaven his beautiful and unmistakable truth: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy”! (Rom. 9:16). God will have his chosen people saved not by their doing of the law but only by the shedding of Christ’s innocent blood on the cross. God will not have us embrace our salvation by the law but by the gift of a true and living faith. We cannot satisfy for all our sins to obtain anything; only Christ can. And he did! God showed mercy to poor and wretched sinners. Christ suffered and died on Calvary, where he wholly accomplished every aspect of our salvation. All of it, finished. The victory, completely and entirely won. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the only perfect one, perfectly accomplished the law for us, perfectly atoned for all of our sins, and perfectly saved his people to life everlasting with him. And because of that work and because God loved us and chose us from all eternity, we may walk freely and thankfully with God’s law as our guide, joyfully saying, “O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97).

21. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.
 22. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:
 23. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.
 24. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Rom. 7:21–24)
1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
 2. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Rom. 8:1–2)

—Karissa Crich

³ Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge*, 1:239.

THE WORLD LEFT HOPELESSLY HARDENED

*And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God,
which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.*
—Revelation 16:9

We read in the text: “And they repented not.” We might think that such severe judgments would break the hearts of these idolaters and murderers and thieves. One-third of men are killed; and no doubt also the rest of men are touched and hurt by the famine and especially by the pestilence. Think of the desolation and the woe and the sorrow and the grief and the suffering this sixth trumpet will cause for the remaining two-thirds that are still alive! All the more we would think that they should repent because it has been so plainly foretold in Scripture that these things come, and come as a revenge of the blood of Christ which is trampled under foot and a judgment upon the iniquity of the world. But no, they repented not. They are hardened. Even as Pharaoh repented not when plague after plague so plainly came from the hand of Jehovah, but continued till his judgment was complete, so also the wicked world at the end of time will not repent until their destruction is finished. We must expect also this feature. You must expect disappointment if you imagine that judgment will do what the gospel could not accomplish. In the midst of judgment the hearts will become more hardened and embittered, and people will

continue in their sins. Their end will be in the pool that burneth with fire and brimstone.

Hence, the great lesson for the people of God contained in this particular passage is this: turn away from such! Have nothing to do with the world that tramples under foot the blood of Christ, except in as far as you are called to be the light of the world and to spread the testimony of the gospel. Have no communion with their idolatry and murders and thefts and fornication. Then it may be that the bitterness of the world will seek revenge upon you for a time. It may be that you will have to bear their contempt, their hatred, and their persecution. Nevertheless, there is no danger whatsoever. The people of God are sealed. And therefore you should not fear those that can kill the body and cannot touch the soul. But much rather fear Him who ruleth over all and who can condemn both soul and body in hell.

Be not afraid! In the world ye shall have tribulation, saith the Lord; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. In the darkest night the eternal morning of glory shall surely dawn, and the faithful shall receive the crown of glory.¹

—Karissa Crich

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh! An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Homer C. Hoeksema, 2nd ed., (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 332–33.



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. — 1 Peter 5:6–7

Asickening and deadly disease! It is sickening to behold in a man or woman. It is like looking at an open wound right down to the bone, gangrenous and oozing. The disease is also deadly, deadly like leprosy of old; once it lays hold on you, then you are a dead man. And this sickening and deadly disease laid hold on the human race—and so upon your mind, will, and flesh too—when Adam exalted himself against God. Pride is the disease. Death is the result. The condemnation of the devil is this disease. For as lordly a creature as God made the devil, he was lifted up in pride and cast down to destruction. He will inhabit the eternal wasting of the lowest hell forever. And so will all his children.

That is why Christ had to go to hell on the tree of the cross. That is why all his sufferings were twinged with that blackness all his life long. That is why the darkness came! That is why God could push his Son into the deepest pains, torments, and anguish of hellish agonies on the cross away from the prying eyes of men—because our sin in Adam was pride. And our sin is always tainted with the loathsome stench of that disgusting disease as we exalt ourselves.

From that terrible punishment for our pride, we are delivered by the cross of Christ. In him we receive grace. In him we are lifted up and sit even now in heavenly places with the promise and hope of everlasting life. Not the deepest hell for proud sinners, but the highest heaven will be our everlasting habitation in Christ Jesus.

Humble yourself therefore! You are sitting now in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, but with a sinful nature that is full of pride. And so God's hand must be heavy on you. Yes, as a good Father, he must chastise you to humble all your pride. He must show you where that pride is deeply rooted in your nature and in your life. He must show you where you resist his word and where you exalt yourself above your brethren. Yes, God resists that pride. Not to your destruction! No, he resists it in his love for you and for your good and with his heavy hand so that he might show you all your pride. Humble yourself. Become nothing.

And when his hand is heavy on you, do you not become anxious and full of cares? There is the straying son, the painful affliction, the mocking enemy of the gospel! And you are so soon full of cares. Cast those cares upon him! Not my will, O Lord, be done, but thine alone! Lord, let this turn to the advantage and salvation of thy people! Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief!

For he cares for you! He has a most Fatherly and tender care for his people. Eternally he willed their salvation, and eternally he willed that all—good and evil—must serve their salvation. And so he works in your life. He will not let you perish in your sinful pride, and so he gives to you his heavy hands. And when he gives his heavy hand, he gives his grace, and he assures you in all your cares that he cares for you.

And he will exalt you in due time. Not in this life. It is far too dangerous for you to be exalted in this life. Now you must bear reproach and sorrow to humble you. He will exalt you in the heavens where you will live and reign with Jesus Christ world without end, a glory into which you enter along the way of much tribulation.

—NJL