

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 minimalist and graphic.

SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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THE WONDERFUL GOD OF WEATHER

Behold, God is great, and we know him not,
 Neither can the number of his years be searched out.
 For he maketh small the drops of water:
 They pour down rain according to the vapour
 thereof:
 Which the clouds do drop
 And distil upon man abundantly.
 Also can any understand the spreadings of the
 clouds,
 Or the noise of his tabernacle?
 Behold, he spreadeth his light upon it,
 And covereth the bottom of the sea.
 For by them judgeth he the people;
 He giveth meat in abundance.
 With clouds he covereth the light;
 And commandeth it not to shine
 By the cloud that cometh betwixt.
 The noise thereof sheweth concerning it,
 The cattle also concerning the vapour.
 At this also my heart trembleth,
 And is moved out of his place.
 Hear attentively the noise of his voice,
 And the sound that goeth out of his mouth.
 He directeth it under the whole heaven,
 And his lightning unto the ends of the earth.
 After it a voice roareth:
 He thundereth with the voice of his excellency;
 And he will not stay them when his voice is heard.
 God thundereth marvellously with his voice;
 Great things doeth he, which we cannot
 comprehend.
 For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth;
 Likewise to the small rain,
 And to the great rain of his strength.
 He sealeth up the hand of every man;
 That all men may know his work.
 Then the beasts go into dens,
 And remain in their places.
 Out of the south cometh the whirlwind:
 And cold out of the north.
 By the breath of God frost is given:
 And the breadth of the waters is straitened.
 Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud:
 He scattereth his bright cloud:

And it is turned round about by his counsels:
 That they may do whatsoever he commandeth
 them
 Upon the face of the world in the earth.
 He causeth it to come, whether for correction,
 Or for his land, or for mercy.—Job 36:26–37:13

God is great, and we know him not, and the number of his years cannot be searched out. Such is the doctrine of Elihu as he instructs Job and rebukes Job's three friends. This is what Job forgot and what Job's friends did not teach. God is great. He is incomprehensible in his majesty and glory. He inhabits eternity, and he cannot be searched out or comprehended by man. If Job had remembered that, he would not have complained of God's dealings with him or demanded that God justify himself in his works with Job. If Job's friends had understood that, they would not have spoken of God the thing that is not right.

Saying, "God is great," is the same as saying, "God is God alone." He is God, and the creature is not God. He is God, and man is not God. He is God, so he does what he wills in the earth and with the children of men. He is God, and he alone determines the eternal destinies of all men, whether elect or reprobate. He determines the course of the entire creation and brings creation to its eternally appointed end. He directs the lives of all men according to his good pleasure and for the revelation of his perfect sovereignty.

God is great. God is God. He is the reality behind all things; he works all things after the counsel of his own will; and he directs all things according to his sovereign and eternal counsel in order to realize and bring to pass his perfect purpose, for the glorification of his own name and the praise of his eternal covenant by the perfection of all things in Jesus Christ his Son.

As the demonstration of his doctrine, Elihu points to God as the God of weather.

Nothing is more ubiquitous in the life of man than the weather. Nothing is seemingly so ordinary. Men casually discuss the weather. Men watch and observe the weather. Men seek to predict the weather. Men bless and curse the weather. The weather powerfully controls man's work and his life in the creation. No matter his technological

advancement, man is dependent on a few inches of topsoil and the weather, for all men must eat. In the weather all men can see that God is great. Very few arrive at the doctrine of Elihu that God is great. Holding the truth down in unrighteousness, men fail to worship and to praise the wonderful God of weather and so to confess that God is great. In all their grumbling and complaining about the weather, men also fail to confess that God is great.

But, behold God! Elihu bids us to see, worship, confess, fear, acknowledge, believe, and humble ourselves before this awesome God. If the weather is mysterious, infinitely more mysterious is the God of the weather who is to be worshiped.

You must admit that weather is wonderful. Elihu calls our attention to the weather and many of the things that are connected with the weather: the gentle rain and the powerful storm, the clouds, the thunder and lightning, the snow and the ice that chill the ground and cover the seas. Weather in all its different forms is in view: weather as it is related to the changing of the seasons, weather as it brings food to man and beast, weather as it controls the lives of man and beasts.

The weather is marvelous. This is what Elihu says: “God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend” (37:5). The word “marvellously” is *miraculously*. Because weather is the work of God, weather is marvelous. God does wonderful, mysterious, and miraculous things when he thunders with his voice. If that is true of the thunder, it is true of the lightning, the rain, the snow, the wind, the storms, and all the various forms of the weather. Those things are great, and we cannot comprehend them or the one who does them.

Being wonderful, these things always point away from themselves to the reality that stands behind them: God!

Wonderful weather! Wonderful God!

The origin of weather was not in the first creation but at the flood. Prior to the flood there was no rain, but dew watered the ground, and waters were above the earth and below the earth reserved by God for the judgment of the flood. At the flood God opened the windows of heaven and the fountains of the deep, and waters covered the whole earth and destroyed the world that then was, and another form of creation was born out of the ruins of that creation. That new world was a world of wonderful weather. So God said to Noah, “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:22).

Weather! Seasons! While the earth remains!

Listen to the wise man’s wonder at the weather. Men

follow the weather, but none can outdo Elihu in his fascination with the weather. He sees God draw up the moisture from the earth to make the clouds, which he spreads around wherever he wills, and he distills their moisture as rain that he pours back down on the earth *abundantly*. Let me give you a few figures. One inch of rain falling from the clouds on one square mile of land equals around seventeen million gallons of water.

Abundantly!

Later Elihu says that God burdens the clouds with rain. The average lazy-summer-day cloud weighs about one million pounds. What then of a storm cloud? God makes enormous clouds that reach to the heights. “Who,” asks Elihu, “can understand the spreading, or billowing, of God’s clouds?”

The clouds that flash with lightning and roll with great crashes of thunder!

The noise of God’s tabernacle!

The sound of God’s voice!

These are the sounds that go out of God’s mouth. He shouts in the thunder. He casts out his lightnings, and he roars with his voice. He brings the small rain—gentle and pleasant—and sends the great rain of his strength—violent and brutal—that stops man in his tracks, makes all his activities to cease, and causes the beasts to scurry into their dens and caves and lairs for cover. Then all men in particular see the hand and hear the voice of God! He brings a whirlwind out of the south and bitter cold out of the north. He blows with his breath and covers the ground with hoarfrost and seals up the waters under ice.

That weather—gentle and violent, expected and unexpected, pleasant and destructive—calls the attention of all to the God of the weather. In that weather God declares plainly and shows convincing evidence that he alone is God, so that all men see in the pleasant April shower and in the terrible summer storm the eternal power and Godhead of God.

God speaks in all these things, so his Word is in these things; and God blows with his breath, so his Spirit is in all these things. He is the God of the Word and Spirit, who are God and who command the weather as God. So also he is the triune God. He is the God who made all things by the Word and Spirit and who upholds and governs all things by that almighty Word and Spirit. By the Word of Jehovah were the heavens made and all the hosts of them by the Breath of his mouth. So he also still speaks, and it is done; he breathes, and it stands fast. God speaks. God breathes. He is the living God because he is the triune God. Thus Elihu speaks not only of how God controls the weather but also of who God is. The wonderful God of weather is the only true God, the living God, the triune God, and the maker of heaven and earth.

If you and I cannot hear God speaking in the storms, wind, rain, snow, ice, fire, gales, hurricanes, and tornadoes, we are unbelieving.

And that is what man is by nature. Man by nature is more ignorant than a beast. Elihu says that by storms God announces his presence to the cattle of the field: “The noise thereof sheweth concerning it, the cattle also concerning the vapour” (Job 36:33). This means that God announces his presence with clouds, storms, winds, flashes of lightning, and crashes of thunder; and even the brute beasts tremble at the presence of God.

“The clouds,” says the wise man, “are God’s tabernacle”—a little tent that he pitches for himself in some part of the world, where he makes his presence known and by which all men see that he is God and that he must be worshiped.

But man holds that truth under in unrighteousness. Understand that men behold God’s works. Elihu makes that plain. Men see very plainly that the weather is the work of God. Men see the weather, and men see that God is the God of weather, that he sends it, controls it, and does his pleasure by means of it. But being full of hatred toward God, man will not worship God. Man will not acknowledge God, tremble before him, confess him to be the only, true God, will not seek him or believe in him.

That is because of the spiritual state of man’s heart. Elihu says, “My heart trembleth, and is moved out of his place” (37:1). This is a revelation of the source of the believer’s worship before the God of the storm, the wonderful God of weather. God has regenerated the believer’s heart, so that he not only sees God’s mighty works but also worships God on account of them. But the unbeliever does not tremble, not with the trembling of faith. He sees that weather is the work of God; and in his hatred toward God, the unbeliever denies it. He creates an idol. He said, “Baal,” if he was a Canaanite. If he is a modern and sophisticated Canaanite—all of whom are more wicked and less excusable than the Canaanites of Sodom and Gomorrah or of Tyre and Zidon—he says, “Mother nature,” or “Evolution,” or “Climate change,” or “Global warming”! These are all his idols. If he is a corrupt and unbelieving Israelite who has departed from God, he says, “Theistic evolution.” But it is the same wicked idol and the same ignorant and inexcusable folly of seeing God and denying that God is or that he must be worshiped

Weather—gentle and violent, expected and unexpected, pleasant and destructive—calls the attention of all to the God of the weather. In that weather God declares plainly and shows convincing evidence that he alone is God.

and changing the glory of God into some vain idol of man’s vainer imagination.

This is clear in man’s very reporting of the weather, which is thoroughly atheistic. Can you imagine a biblical, spiritual weather report? God drew up the water from the earth in British Columbia, and he sent down a deluge on Dubuque, Iowa. God gathered the moisture from Lake Michigan, sent forth his cold blast, and caused ten inches of snow in Grand Rapids, Michigan. God formed the massive storm in the far north and sent it crashing into the Midwest with hurricane force winds, piles of snow or torrents of rain, and power outages all around. But man does not say that because he is an ignorant, malicious hater of God.

Think of what we—you and I—do with the weather. “It is raining.”

It is raining?

How often do we worship God for the weather? Perhaps when it is fair, but what do we do when the weather is foul? We complain, gripe, criticize—yes, we criticize the weather that God chose and decreed for that day. We are that bold and haughty.

Behold, God is great! That is what man will not say in light of the weather. Every day he is surrounded by the testimony of the weather—of the changing temperature, the changing wind, the changing season, the changing humidity, the changing barometric pressure. With every sunrise, every storm, every cloud, and every drop of rain, man is confronted with this truth, this cry of the entire creation—even the brute beasts rebuke man’s inexcusable madness—“Behold, God is great!”

But man will not say that. He is so ignorant, so wicked, and so full of hatred toward God that man will not even say that in the face of a mighty hurricane, a terrible thunderstorm, or a mighty gale that makes a mockery of all man’s buildings. When the beasts of the forests and the animals of the world retreat into their dens and caves and lairs before the face of God, man foolishly and contumaciously stands and defies God.

Surely, then, if man will not behold God and say, “God is great in the weather,” man is also ignorant of God’s purposes with the weather.

Weather is not only the work of God, but weather is also the work of God by which he accomplishes his wonderful purposes according to his perfect will. The wise man says, “It is turned round about by his counsels:

that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth” (37:12). By the words “upon the face of the world in the earth,” Elihu emphasizes God’s works in the whole world. Everywhere in the world he works this. “It” refers to “his bright cloud” in verse 11: “Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud.” That is a flashing and thundering storm cloud. So Elihu has in view all the phenomena of the weather. God turns them by his counsels. Eternally, he decreed the weather and every aspect of that weather.

God’s eternal counsel is also his living command, so that he executes his eternal decree in the weather in order to accomplish and bring to pass his sovereign will. In every drop of rain, every bolt of lightning, every snowflake, every crash of thunder is the work of God according to his eternal decree.

And verse 13 says that God “causeth it to come.” This means that God causes the weather to hit the mark. Like an arrow shot by a skilled archer hits the target, so the weather as decreed by God and carried out by God hits its mark and does exactly what he willed with it. God is a divine archer who hits his mark every time. With every raindrop and every lightning bolt and every snowflake and every ice crystal, he hits his mark. They fall precisely where he ordained, and they serve precisely the purpose that he decreed. He certainly and infallibly brings to pass what he determined to do with the weather.

So what does the text say is God’s will and the reason he brings all this wonderful weather?

“That all men may know his work” (37:7). God declares himself every day to be God alone. He declares that to the ends of the earth. He declares that he is almighty, that he is excellent in power, that he is mighty in judgment and plenteous in justice, that he will not afflict, and that he alone must be worshiped. God mightily declares his presence in order that all men may know his works. And this means that all men know them, not in order that they acknowledge and praise God but that they be without excuse in the day of judgment for their failure to worship him on account of their inexcusable folly, malice, and wickedness.

“By them judgeth he the people” (36:31). “The people” means nations. “Them” refers to the lightning and thus also to all the different phenomena of a storm. So, for instance, “them” refers to the wind, the rain, the lightning and thunder, the snow and the lack thereof. The God of weather is not some local, tribal, or national deity; he is the God of the whole earth. And he constantly judges by means of the weather. This is also in harmony with the word of Elihu: “Behold God! He is great!” The word *great* is only ever used in scripture of God, and it means that

he is an absolute sovereign. He does among the nations and among men what he willed and decreed. Our God is the governor of the whole world. Part of that government is his judgment among the nations. He judges by the storms; the winds; the rain; the thunder; the lightning; and the hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons that he sends on the earth.

And notice that in parallel with this, God feeds: “He giveth meat in abundance” (36:31). God judges by feeding too. He judges the wicked by feeding in his wrath and hot displeasure. Being angry with the wicked every day, he judges by giving them many things through excellent weather and so also sets them in slippery places in order to cast them down to destruction.

Regarding the believer and God’s people, he judges by feeding because he gives them food and drink in his favor and wonderful grace. But he judges in feeding! Always with every drop of rain, he judges by feeding, giving meat in abundance. Does that not also bring up the famine? For when God gives abundance here and there, he also withholds abundance here and there. Yet in fruitful years or barren, he judges, and that too according to his sovereign counsel of election and reprobation. To the elect, fruitful years and famine always come with the blessing of God. To the reprobate, fruitful years and famine always come with the cursing of God.

And the wise man focuses on this purpose of God with the weather: with every drop of rain in the whole world and every snowflake, God is mindful of his people and his covenant that embraces the entire creation. Elihu speaks of this in verse 13. God causes the weather—the storm, the gentle rain or the flood of his power, the blast of the cold or the gentle warm breezes, the changing of the seasons, the whirlwind, the thunderheads, and the hurricanes and gales—“to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy.”

These words come to the heart of God’s purpose in the weather and in all that he does with the seasons and the rains. The heart of that purpose of God is his covenant. This is what the word “mercy” indicates. That word speaks of God’s steadfast, covenant love for his people. All that he does in the world—now applied specifically to the weather—has in view his people, his covenant, and his promised mercy to them. Sometimes, by his work he has in view their correction. The word “correction” is the word for a rod. Fathers use rods in mercy to correct their children.

And God’s purpose in the weather is also for “his land.” This means the creation. God’s land is his creation, and he has a covenant that encompasses the entire creation, so that he will care for the creation and his people in that creation until he makes that creation perfect in the

new heavens and the new earth. Everything God does in the weather is done in mercy, for his covenant, for correction, and for his land.

And that because God judged us in Jesus Christ. The storm is not for our destruction but for our good; the famine is not for our destruction but for our good; the rain, the ice, and the snow and all that God works in the world by them do not come for our destruction and with a curse because the storm of God's wrath broke on Jesus Christ and cursed him for our sakes. And this Jesus Christ God also raised up and made Lord of all, by whom God rules and governs all things for his people's sake. For this reason we worship instead of defying in hate-filled fear the God of the weather.

Now does not your heart tremble then, and is it not moved out of its place? Elihu trembled when God announced his presence in a storm. Elihu says regarding everything he observed of God's dealings in the weather, "Behold God; God is great!" Elihu asks, "Who can know God, and can the number of his years be searched out?" Elihu says that only in Jesus Christ. Elihu says that in worshipful awe and in the knowledge that he was judged righteous in Christ. Otherwise, the God of weather must terrify. We cannot even comprehend all that he does in one aspect of creation that we call the weather. He makes every snowflake unique, trillions of raindrops, clouds

manifold, and the ice. Then to believe that he does all these things with Christ and his people at the heart of all of them. Surely, he does things marvelously and things that we cannot comprehend.

And if we cannot comprehend God's works, how much more is this not true concerning him who works all these things after the counsel of his own will and which things are thus at his command in order to bring to pass what he decreed?

How great a God in mercy is he. That in all of these mighty and wonderful and incomprehensible things that he does in the world of weather, he causes them all to come, and he infallibly hits his mark, whether for judgment, for correction, for his land, or for mercy. He is ever mindful of his covenant and his covenant people.

Oh, how small is man. Yet this God has taken thought for his people. He is ever mindful of his people. He does all things in the world—now especially in the weather—for his people and for his own covenant, to bring it to perfection in the new heavens.

And so, we worship this God. We humble ourselves before him. We call on him. We expect all good from him. We believe that since he is our God and our Father that he will provide us with all things necessary for soul and body.

—NJL

EDITORIAL

PRAISE GOD, FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW (2): LEGALISM

The Issue is Legalism

I have been contending in speeches and writing against the assault on the church's liberty in the gospel by the doctrine called exclusive psalmody as promoted by Rev. A. Lanning and defended by three elders, a deacon, and others who have seceded from the Reformed Protestant Churches and formed a new church. I call their doctrine

exclusive psalmody simply for ease of expression. I am not against singing only the psalms in church, but that is not Reverend Lanning's teaching. His doctrine, based on the second commandment, is that God commands in public worship that the church must sing only "the psalms, those 150 God-inspired songs," and that to sing anything else is the dread sin of image worship.¹

¹ "In the one category are the psalms, those 150 God-inspired songs; and in the other category are the hymns, which are not the inspired songs of God." Andrew Lanning, "The Regulative Principle of Worship," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on March 12, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

I want to establish that this is his doctrine. He preached,

In the church of Jesus Christ only those things that God has commanded may belong to worship, and all of those things that God has not said anything about or that he has forbidden may not be part of the worship... The principle is not this: worship God in whatever way is not forbidden in his word, so that you're free to do many, many things as long as God doesn't explicitly forbid it. That regulative principle flows right out of the prohibition against graven images because a graven image is an attempt of the church to worship God in a way that appeals to her, in a way that her will inclines towards. The regulative principle is this: worship God only as he has commanded in his word, only with those elements of worship that he has said belong to that worship.²

Applying that principle to the singing of the church in public worship, Reverend Lanning says, "Do not depart from those psalms to sing something else."³ And: "The worship of Jehovah in the matter of singing requires the psalms and exclusive psalmody."⁴

I have contended that the principal issue in this controversy is legalism in the application of the second commandment to the worship of the church—legalism in the application of that commandment specifically to singing.

The specific form of that legalism is that Jesus Christ does not sing with his church and that his church does not sing with Jesus Christ until the church sings the psalms accurately enough, purely enough, closely enough. In that specific form Jesus Christ has been separated from his church, and the church has been separated from Jesus Christ. That is why the doctrine is so damnable and deadly. The union of Christ with his church—Christ's dwelling in his church by his word and Spirit and his church's being bone of Christ's bone and flesh of Christ's flesh—is the most precious truth about the church's salvation. We have been separated from the perishing race of Adam and joined to Jesus Christ. With this doctrine of exclusive psalmody, the church has again been separated from her head.

With this false doctrine the church's singing becomes the *way*—I use the word deliberately—in which the church sings with Jesus. To put it more simply: the specific form of legalism is that man's activity of singing is the condition for man's fellowship with Jesus Christ. Singing

with Jesus is fellowship with Jesus. And it is man's activity of singing that is decisive in his fellowship with Jesus.

That fact about the false doctrine is why we cannot abide it. It is offensive. It is offensive in the extreme to God, to Jesus Christ, to the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who indwells the church and by whose power the church has fellowship with Christ and by whose power she also sings. And it is an offense to the church, who has been separated from her husband. Such a thought is intolerable to the church even for a moment.

Singing with Jesus

Reverend Lanning taught that Jesus does not sing with the church and the church does not sing with Jesus until the church first sings the psalms. The basis of this teaching is that Jesus sings the psalms. I do not like that language: *Jesus sings the psalms*. That ends up the church in a bad spot. Many are enamored with that language, but it is not Reformed language. That is how the churches were led down the trail of legalism. They were tricked by that language: *Jesus sings the psalms*.

But Jesus is the one to whom we sing. Jesus is the one we worship. He sits on the mighty throne of God, and every knee bows before him, and his people say to him, "My Lord and my God," and sing to him, "Worthy is the Lamb." Jesus was a man. Jesus undoubtedly sang the psalms when he was on the earth. He sang a psalm with his disciples after the institution of the Lord's supper and before they went out into the night to go to the garden.

But the idea that Jesus sings the psalms is not the key to the church's doctrine of singing. That idea was bait. To the church of Jesus Christ, there is nothing more precious than to be with her Lord and to follow in the footsteps of her Lord. Using her love for Jesus Christ against her, the church was enticed with that language: *Jesus sings the psalms*.

That Jesus sings the psalms "is the key" to the false doctrine that was promoted in the Reformed Protestant Churches. Reverend Lanning made that the key by his own admission: "That the Lord Jesus Christ is the singer of the psalms is the key to understanding the psalms, and it's the key to understanding this text [Psalm 18]."⁵

Following from that Reverend Lanning said this:

That [Jesus sings the psalms] has implications, too, for the church's singing in worship. That as the church understands what those psalms are,

2 Andrew Lanning, "No Image Worship," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on March 5, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=35232335114953>.

3 Lanning, "No Image Worship."

4 Lanning, "The Regulative Principle of Worship."

5 Andrew Lanning, "Recompensed according to My Righteousness," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on May 2, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=522115542507>.

then the church desires those psalms and is zealous for those psalms and becomes intolerant of anything replacing those psalms. The church will not suffer a hymn to come into her midst, that is, a man-made hymn. That's not a psalm from the word of God because when the church sings that hymn and all her mouths are open and all her voices are raising to the rafters, the Lord Jesus Christ isn't singing that song, though the church might sing it. That's not the Lord's psalm. It's not the word of Christ. It's not the word of his Spirit, and so the church will not have that hymn.⁶

And again, Reverend Lanning said, "He [Jesus] doesn't sing with the church if her doxology is not a psalm."⁷ Then again, he said,

The church becomes dissatisfied with versifications of the psalms that are only summaries of the psalm and that are close but not quite the psalm and that are only man's interpretation of the psalm. That becomes after a while intolerable to the church because when she sings a man's summary of a psalm, she's not singing the word of Christ. And Christ isn't singing that song with her. Only the church's voices are heard, but the voice of Christ is not heard in heaven in that song.⁸

Understand what all of that means: It does not mean that Jesus sings the psalms in and through his church by his indwelling Spirit and word. The church's singing is the result or fruit of her being with Jesus. That is not what the promoters of exclusive psalmody mean by *Jesus sings the psalms*. Rather, Jesus—wholly apart from a consideration of his church and his church's singing—sings the psalms by himself. If the church chooses to sing the psalms, then she may sing with Jesus. But he does not sing with his church when she sings anything else besides the psalms.

That doctrine of Jesus' singing the psalms reminds me of a husband—a stupid husband, a foolish husband, an unbelieving husband—who has his life. He has his life apart from his wife. He does not live through his wife. That is what a husband is supposed to do; he is supposed to live through his wife. He lives through his wife because they are one flesh. But this husband has his life apart from a consideration of his wife. He really lives apart from her. He charges ahead in his life, and he says to his wife, "Keep up. Keep up!" That is the Jesus who sings the psalms here; he is like that husband. Jesus is singing away, and he says

to his wife, the church, "Well, you may sing with me. You may sing with me, if you do this and if you do that and if you do not do that." And mind you, I say, *if you do this and if you do that and if you do not do that* because what exactly is entailed in order for the church to sing with Jesus has not been spelled out.

If Jesus sings the psalms and he does not sing with his church if she sings anything other than the psalms, then the crucial question for the church becomes, what does it mean to sing the psalms? What does it mean that Jesus sings the psalms? Does he sing the Hebrew? Does he sing the King James Version? With this false doctrine, what it means to sing the psalms becomes a vital question. That is a life-or-death question for the church. And the proponents of this false doctrine will have every one with his own idea about what it means to sing the psalms and then what it means that Jesus sings the psalms and then what it means to sing the psalms with Jesus. Reverend Lanning has already said that versifications, man's interpretations, and man's summaries are no good. What is Jesus singing then? Whatever he is singing, the Jesus of this false doctrine is not living in and through his church by his indwelling word and Spirit. That Jesus is not singing through his church by his indwelling word and Spirit. Jesus is singing alongside the church, and the church is invited to join with Jesus Christ.

The Proper Understanding of the Regulative Principle

That doctrine of exclusive psalmody I charge with legalism. It is legalism, first of all, because it has an erroneous view of the second commandment and the so-called regulative principle of public worship.

I want to explain the right and proper understanding of the regulative principle. I have taught this understanding of the regulative principle my entire ministry. Those who have heard my preaching know that. I have never changed in my doctrine of the regulative principle. The regulative principle teaches that the various *elements* of public worship are commanded by God and that what element is not commanded by God is forbidden.

Others go farther in their definition of the regulative principle and add the word *circumstances*. The elements of the public worship and the circumstances of the public worship must be commanded by God. I believe with the addition of the word *circumstances* that the regulative principle can be expanded to include many things that it does not include, and by that means the church can be brought into bondage to man's scruples and whims.

6 Lanning, "Recompensed according to My Righteousness."

7 Lanning, "Recompensed according to My Righteousness."

8 Lanning, "Recompensed according to My Righteousness."

The regulative principle deals with elements, the specific elements of the church's worship. Those specific elements are the church's main activities in her public worship of God. The regulative principle does not specify circumstances. In other words, the regulative principle does not specify *how* those elements are carried out. Let me give you some examples of that. We preach every Sunday; we administer the Lord's supper only four times a year. We may do that because the administration of the Lord's supper belongs to the circumstances of worship. It would not be wrong to have the Lord's supper more frequently. Jesus said that there must be preaching and there must be sacraments, but the circumstances of them are up to the liberty of the church. Jesus said that there must be singing. Whether or not there is accompaniment of that singing is a circumstance. The regulative principle does not deal with circumstances. There must be a collection, but whether that collection is taken with a box in the back of church or with a plate or with a bag is simply a circumstance. These all fall under the circumstances, and so they all fall under the category of the church's liberty. She has the liberty to arrange the circumstances of her worship of God without ever binding or compelling a conscience. This is precisely what the Reformed church fathers did in article 69 of the Reformed Church Order. Out of the principle of the church's liberty in Christ, the Synod of Dordt regulated the singing in the church as best conducive to edification, to decency, and to order.

The elements are commanded. For the Reformed worship service this means that there is preaching, the regular administration of the sacraments, calling upon the name of God by song and prayer, and taking collections for the care of the poor (Lord's Day 38).

The regulative principle also recognizes the centrality of the word in the church's worship. Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism recognizes that when it says that we must worship God as he commands in his word. The word is the center of the church's worship. It is the Word who is worshiped. It is the word that is preached. It is the word that is partaken of. It is the word that is prayed. It is the word for which the church gives thanks. Worship God as he commands in his word—not the circumstances but the elements of worship.

Those elements are the timeless things by which God's people have worshiped God in every age. The elements never change. They do not change if God's people are worshiping him in China, the United States, Singapore, or the Philippines. The circumstances may change; the elements never change. The church is to worship God in the way he commands.

The Believer's Whole Life

Furthermore, the regulative principle applies to the entire life of the child of God. In all my life and in every circumstance of my life, I worship God as he commands in his word. My life is not to be self-willed but subject to the will of God as laid out in his word. In order to bring in the position of exclusive psalmody, the meaning of the second commandment has been restricted to the public worship. This is never how the Reformed churches have viewed the second commandment. The second commandment has a vital application to the public worship of the church, but the commandment applies to the whole life of the believer. Putting it into the language of the Old Testament: Israel might not worship God by images—not in their homes and not in the temple—and so the church today may never be self-willed in her worship of God, whether in the home or in the public worship. It is this broad application of the second commandment that the apostle makes, for instance, in Colossians 2:20–23:

20. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,
21. (Touch not; taste not; handle not;
22. Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?
23. Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

From this passage the church has defined the meaning of the second commandment as forbidding self-willed worship of God devised in man's unbelieving and carnal heart. The subject in the passage is the second commandment. In the apostle's application of the second commandment, he speaks about the church's life in the world, as he makes clear by the words "as though living in the world" and when he gives examples of the false doctrine against which he was contending as teaching "touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using." He speaks about the church's use of the whole world and thus the church's whole life in the world. The second commandment has application to the entire life of the believer. Then the apostle speaks of those who are self-willed and attempt in their self-will to bring the church into bondage to the doctrines and the commandments of men and who spoil many.

And the apostle gives the church a sharp warning about the corruption of the second commandment by men who have the appearance of godliness. Beware of men parading as spiritual and godly but whose doctrines are out of their own brains and whose religion is self-devised and

self-serving. Beware of them because they come with deceptive doctrines that snake their way into the heart and will rob you of your simplicity in Christ, rob you of your joy and happiness in Christ, and rob you of your inheritance. They are thieves, these men, with their philosophies. They come with the appearance of wisdom. They have arguments and passages from scripture and appear even to have history on their side. But when you examine their doctrines, they do not harmonize with Christ and the perfection that is ours in Christ. Their doctrines do not harmonize with the truth that we are dead with Christ and complete in him.

The form that their doctrines take is ordinances: a host of ceremonies, commandments, strictures, regulations, and rules. Even more sinister, the ordinances are all those things that man must do in order to have Jesus Christ and to be pleasing to God. The false teachers withhold Christ and the loveliness, joy, comfort, and assurance of Christ from the believer until their commandments, strictures, regulations, and rules are performed. Thus also these false teachers come from the idea that holiness is found in an outward form, that righteousness is found in the outward deed, and that religion is a matter of do and do not do. Not satisfied with the earthly form in which Christ sanctifies his people and his rule in their lives by the Holy Spirit, so that their whole lives become holy and testimonies that they are of God, these religious philosophers and vain deceivers make holiness to consist in their commandments and in an outward form.

So the apostle asks, “Why, if you are dead with Christ, would you be subject to ordinances?” These false teachers come with their touch not, taste not, handle not; and you fall for their philosophies and their vain deceits, their doctrines and commandments of men? You allow your peace, joy, and freedom in Christ to be disturbed by the false teachers? “Touch not,” they say, and you wonder in your minds if, indeed, you cannot touch. “Taste not,” they thunder, and your consciences are disturbed about whether, indeed, it is Christian and holy to taste. And because man knows no end to his inventions of rules,

regulations, commandments, and strictures, then, after you have listened to and given place to these false teachers for a moment, and they have beguiled you with their vain deceits, they also add rule upon rule and precept upon precept and command you, “Handle not!” And having given their doctrines a hearing and those doctrines having snaked their way into your minds, the false teachers plunder you of your joy, peace, comfort, hope, and freedom in Christ. And you, like them, are also subject to ordinances, and you live as those whose lives are in the world and who have not passed into heaven. Christ is erased from your very minds and thoughts, the perfection of Christ and

your perfection in him fade from view, and all you can think about is ordinances, what you must do or not do and how you must do it or not do it.

But the doctrines and commandments of men they are. That is all that these doctrines and commandments are. That is all they ever will be. Some are impious. Others are tyrannical and terrifying. Still others are silly and trifling! Some come with the appearance of right and with the weight of history. But they are all of them of man and only of man and not of God or out of his word.

And if you—who are dead with Christ from the elements of the world—would again be subject to ordinances, do you not know that the commandments and doctrines of man—not of God—that forbid you to touch, to taste, and to handle “perish with the using”? To perish with the using means that these ordinances tend to corruption. That which they corrupt is the all of religion. They corrupt the believer. They corrupt the church. They corrupt the truth. They corrupt faith. They corrupt peace, hope, and joy. They corrupt the idea of God. They corrupt Christ and his salvation. They corrupt absolutely because they lead all who follow them down into hell. The teachers of these doctrines and commandments insist so eagerly and vehemently upon them as if they were essential to salvation. But they do not bring salvation but corruption.

These false teachers, religious philosophers, and vain deceivers make so many disciples and rob many of their simplicity in Christ because they themselves and the

The apostle gives the church a sharp warning about the corruption of the second commandment by men who have the appearance of godliness... but whose doctrines are out of their own brains and whose religion is self-devised and self-serving. Beware...they come with deceptive doctrines that snake their way into the heart and will rob you of your simplicity in Christ... of your joy and happiness in Christ, and...of your inheritance.

things they teach have a “shew”; they have an appearance. They have an appearance in contrast to a reality. They are not real. They are not the truth. They are a lie. They are a deception, phantasm, legerdemain, and a conjurer’s trick. They are not real but damnable, not good but tending to corruption. Their show includes reasons, explanations, texts, logic, and arguments for their doctrines. With this reasoning and the rest, their doctrines have a show that they are good and wise and that thus only in the way of their doctrines and in the way of their commandments is the knowledge of God and eternal life.

But the doctrines and commandments are nothing but will worship. They all come from men’s fevered brains, their unbelieving minds, and their wicked hearts. The false teachers come in their deliberate and conscious rebellion against the word and the will of God that Christ have the preeminence, that his people and all things be perfected in Christ. These deceivers have nothing in Christ, and so they seek to displace Christ with their doctrines, commandments, laws, rules, and regulations. But their doctrines and commandments have no basis in the word of God or in the will of God but in men’s wills, their self-serving and self-pleasing wills.

And all the false teachers’ show of humility is false. They do not wear certain clothes, and everyone accounts them as such pious and humble people. They abstain from some meat or drink, and many think them superior Christians. They come protesting that they are only interested in the Christian life and holiness in the church and that their great concern is for the glory of God. And all of their doctrines and commandments that they would foist on the church, they do so under the guise of admirable practices for the church, at the very least not objectionable, and even as better calculated to lead the church in the way of holiness and the antithetical life. And once you listen to the false teachers and give in to them, their list will grow, and there will be no end of outward things that you must do or not do to show that you are a Christian, to have Jesus Christ, to be pleasing to God, and to enjoy the knowledge and assurance of your salvation.

But none of the doctrines and commandments of the false teachers are of any value to God. He says, “Not in any honour.” The false teachers tell the church how pleasing to God she will be if she follows their doctrines and commandments. But none of them is of any value to God. They have no value for righteousness. The only thing that avails for righteousness before God is Christ. The doctrines and commandments of men have no value for holiness, for it is a very wicked thing to do something or to not do something, to eat something or to not eat something, or to sing something or to not sing something in order to be pleasing to God and to be with Jesus Christ. The doctrines

and commandments of men—no matter what the standing of the men who introduce them and no matter how wise, pious, and humble they may seem—are absolutely worthless and without spiritual value whatsoever.

The doctrines and commandments of men do please the flesh, however. How strange is man? He flagellates himself with his invented doctrine and will never with that doctrine enter into the peace, joy, and comfort of Christ. And that pleases his flesh. He delights in his activity as that which he did to come to Jesus and to be with God. Man neglects his body and kills himself with worry, grief, and abstinence and makes himself a laughingstock by his dowdy behavior and pious pretentions, and that pleases his flesh. He prides himself that he did not do this and he did not do that, which things so many others enjoy. It is a great thing for him, and he supposes that it is a great thing to God that he does not eat a certain food, smoke a cigarette, drink beer, wear an article of clothing, or sing a hymn. Pride! That is it. Pride! Such things please the flesh because the flesh is full of pride. If the flesh can do anything for its salvation, even something so silly and trifling as not eating a piece of food, then the flesh will do that for salvation. And in that the flesh will be damned.

Reject all the doctrines and commandments of men. Resist their philosophies and expose their vain conceits. For being dead with Christ, you have been raised with him to immortality and life. You are not of the world, and your life is not in the world, but your life is hidden in heaven with Christ. And you are complete in him.

In light of this passage, what we have experienced in the exclusive psalmody controversy is that a minister of his own will and out of his own brain prescribed for the church a worship of God that God did not prescribe. The minister prescribed that worship as that alone through which God must be served. And, therefore, the minister charged as sinful anyone who stepped outside of that prescription for the worship of God. That arbitrary prescription *is* the will worship. The regulative principle forbids will worship. You cannot decide what pleases you about how you will worship God. God decides your worship. Now the minister has prescribed for the church. He has prescribed on his own authority, not on the authority of the word of God. He has prescribed that God cannot be worshiped apart from singing “the psalms, those 150 God-inspired songs.”

My warning is that the minister and his followers could better sing hymns than to sing a psalm out of their false doctrine that when they sing psalms they sing with Jesus. This is nothing more than a doctrine and a commandment of man.

This doctrine is not only a corruption of the regulative principle, but it is also conditional. To that I turn next time.

—NJL

Another issue of *Sword and Shield* is hot off the presses, has hit your mailboxes, and has found its way into your hands. The new volume year is progressing well. The Lord continues to care for his righteous cause as it is represented by the publication of *Sword and Shield*.

We have had a number of exciting changes in the staff of the magazine, and in this issue you will notice some more. Beginning with this issue there is a new rubric in the magazine called *Running Footmen*. The rubric title reflects the fighting stance of the magazine. *Sword and Shield* was born as a fighting paper, which at the moment it was born had to contend for its very life against a storm of ferocious opposition. By God's grace the publication continues its mission to witness to the distinctive Reformed truth over against the lies both old and new that corrupt that truth.

Sword and Shield was also born as a believer's paper. The believer's witness to the truth in the Protestant Reformed Churches had been silenced in the *Standard Bearer* through the tyrannical and intolerable censorship of the then-current editors, who were intent on destroying the historically sharp and distinctive witness of that magazine by turning it into the equivalent of a denominational rag containing Reformed milk toast that catered to the increasingly doctrineless and ecumenical tastes of the people. There was a spirit of ecumenicity that pervaded the denomination and found enthusiastic support on the staff of the *Standard Bearer*. The people get what they want, and they got what they wanted in the editors

at the *Standard Bearer*: a new sound and a new direction. Instead of its historic stridency for the truth, the *Standard Bearer* began to walk around in silk slippers and whisper seductive things. That ecumenical spirit needed to silence the exposure and sharp condemnation of the lie about conditional covenant fellowship that had taken deep root in the denomination and which lie made possible a broader rapprochement with other Reformed churches.

Over against that and carrying out their calling from Christ to witness to and fight for the truth, a group of believers began the organization Reformed Believers Publishing and began the publication of the new magazine *Sword and Shield*. The magazine is the fighting paper of the Reformed believer and is part of the believer's witness in the world. Reflecting this reality, we have begun a new rubric that will be staffed by a rotation of able and willing writers—Reformed believers all, both men and women.

In addition to the contribution from Mr. Garrett Varnier this month for the new rubric, Mr. Tyler Ophoff continues his work in *Understanding the Times*, and Rev. Luke Bomers carries on his study of the sacrifices of the Old Testament as they are types of the one, great sacrifice of Jesus Christ made once upon the cross by which believers are made perfect forever. We also have an article by our newest writer, Mr. Earl Kamps, a meditation on Psalm 146.

As always, we desire that the truth found on these pages may be food for your souls and a sword in your hands.

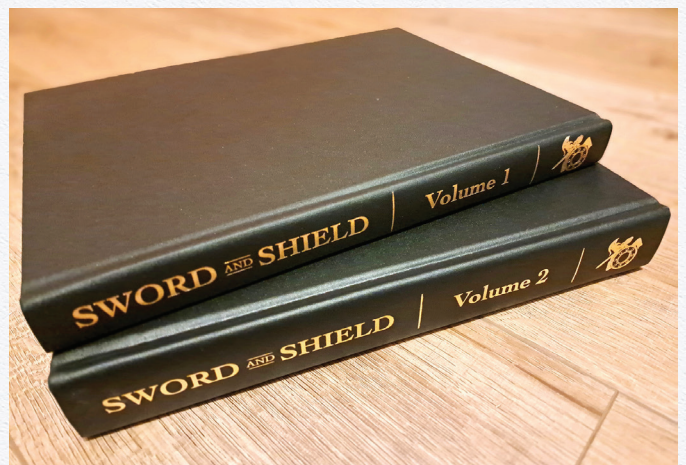
—NJL

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE BOARD

Due to a number of inquiries, the board of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) would like to know if *Sword and Shield* readers would be interested in digital audio recordings of issues of the magazine that they could listen to on their mobile devices and computers. If you would make use of these recordings and want the RBP board to pursue this project, please let Aaron Cleveland know at aaroncleveland@att.net.

Now that volume 3 of *Sword and Shield* is complete, it is time to collect your loose issues for binding. For those who organize their own issues for binding, the cost is \$35.00. Give your issues to a board member of RBP or make arrangements for the issues to be delivered to the RBP office in Byron Center, Michigan. If you would like a bound volume of new issues, email your order to office@reformedbelievers.org. The cost for a volume of new issues is \$45.00.

—Aaron Cleveland, secretary



WHERE WAS THE CROSS?

The Lord laughs in heaven at the vain opposition to his cause and at the folly of men who make their scruples and wills the measure of righteousness and holiness. Such was on display in the “Act of Separation and Joining” meeting of Rev. A. Lanning and his group, as well as in the aftermath in the first worship service of their new church.

The “Act of Separation and Joining” meeting was ostensibly called by Deacon Keith Gritters, although he played almost no role at all in the meeting. Deacon Gritters, in an email to the congregation of First Reformed Protestant Church, had informed the members about the meeting and said, “There will be opportunity to ask questions.” However, no questions were allowed from the attendees except from those who intended to sign the “Act of Separation and Joining.” Obviously, the group had it cooked and dried about who would sign, and the meeting was not intended to answer any questions and give any real answers. If you intended to sign, what meaningful questions could you possibly have? The meeting really was not informative at all. It was merely a performance like on a stage.

What was especially humorous to see, however, was that behind Reverend Lanning, as he spoke, was a gigantic cross.

The church of Jesus Christ loves the cross. She glories in the cross of Jesus Christ. And she is determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. She preaches the cross of Jesus Christ as the only ground and foundation of the salvation of God’s elect church and that by which believers are made perfect forever.

When the position of exclusive psalmody was first attacked, I warned the Reformed Protestant Churches that the doctrine of exclusive psalmody was part of a large purity of worship movement that has been a perennial plague on the churches. As an example of this, I said that soon we would be arguing about whether we could have a cross in church, that the arguments would not stop there, and that the movement—which is legalism and thus does what all legalism does—would result in endless calculations and controversies about how pure the worship of God is.

Where was that gigantic cross that first Sunday when the group came together to worship?

The cross was shrouded behind a curtain.

I thought that perhaps Reverend Lanning at the beginning of the worship service would pull back the curtain in a dramatic display of the church’s liberty in Jesus Christ and as a thorough refutation of those who had warned them about the wider implications of the doctrine of exclusive psalmody.

He did not. The cross remained covered.

I thought that this controversy regarding exclusive psalmody was not about crosses and purity of worship. Then why was that cross covered up? Can someone answer that?

I think I know why the cross was covered. Because unbeknownst to me when I preached that crosses would become involved in our controversy about singing, First Reformed Protestant Church had already had a cross issue, and the legalists won that battle. Crosses had already been removed from the church or covered up.

And the exclusive psalmody doctrine will not stop at crosses.

There was another notable change in the group’s first worship service. The song that concludes the silent prayer was changed. Why was that song changed? Is it not a psalm? If that is the case, then the change is notable because now tunes—mere tunes—are given moral weight, so that they are included in the stricture against singing anything other than a psalm in church. I wonder what other tunes will be purged from the worship services. Perhaps the tune of “Abide with Me,” the tune of “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” the tune of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” or the tune of Luther’s battle hymn of the Reformation, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

This all is evidence of worship controlled by the mere whims of man.

The Reformed Protestant Churches are declared false because they supposedly have enthroned the will of man in worship. On the contrary, in the church of our former members, man’s will is enthroned as the arbiter of what is pure enough in worship.

If there is anyone who has an ear to hear yet, be warned that there is more to come. And hear the call to get out. The fear of men is a snare!

—NJL

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

CORRUPTED FROM THE SIMPLICITY IN CHRIST (2)

Introduction

The Reformed Protestant Churches were hanging on by a thread. As a denomination, we stood on the precipice of swallowing false doctrine and returning to the bondage of our mother, the Protestant Reformed Churches. But the Lord saved us. He cut a hole in the net and preserved us yet again. Jesus Christ preserved his church from the lie of salvation by man, specifically the experience of covenant fellowship at the point of the church's singing, through the work of Christ-appointed elders, who stood as watchmen on the walls and who judged according to right doctrine. And Jesus Christ preserved his church from that lie with his powerful voice. His word swept through the denomination, and his Spirit blew through it like a fire. Christ spoke to his people in the sermon "The Indwelling Word."¹ That sermon is as pivotal in our history as the sermon "Shepherds to Feed You." The Lord God Almighty preserved his church powerfully. He saved us from the mutation of the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches that Reverend Lanning now teaches, the theology of which he was once an ardent and vehement opponent.

I began the first article in this series by stating that one man decided it was time for a new magazine.

Reverend Lanning, one man, decided that it was time for a new magazine. He has thrown off the yoke of the church of Jesus Christ. He attacks and despises the rule of Christ over him through the elders, who judged his doctrine as false. He has thrown off the yoke of a governing board and association. He contends against the counsel of God with his own wisdom and understanding (Prov. 21:30).²

One man also decided it was time to leave the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). Reverend Lanning decided, and Deacon Keith Gritters would be the instrument of Reverend Lanning's will.

On Sunday, May 21, 2023, Deacon Keith Gritters, claiming to be the last faithful officebearer in First Reformed Protestant Church, sent out the "Act of Separation and Joining" to the congregation, calling to the members to come out of her. And for what? Corrupting the gospel truth of justification by faith alone, which is the article of the standing and falling church and the hinge on which the church swings? The law of exclusive psalmody? That would make sense in light of the fact that Reverend Lanning's sermons requiring exclusive psalmody based on the second commandment started the controversy in our churches. But no, Reverend Lanning's charge against First Reformed Protestant Church and the RPC as a denomination is that they have exalted the will of man over the will of God. And this because the Reformed Protestant Churches rejected the doctrine of exclusive psalmody as required by the second commandment and the regulative principle. According to Reverend Lanning at the organizational meeting of the new church, everything done in the RPC will only be the will of man now. We are an affront to the eternal counsel of God. We might preach the Bible, and we might sing the psalms, but it will be only by our own will and not according to the will of God.

But my charge stands as before. Reverend Lanning contends against the will of God, and he and his church will reap the fruit of Reverend Lanning's will. He destroyed in God's temple with his false doctrine. That false doctrine divided Christ from his church. Unless Reverend Lanning turns by God's sovereign grace, he will perish.

16. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?
17. 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. 3:16–17)

Thus ended this whole shameful ordeal before even one article could be published in *Sword and Shield* in response to the developments in the RPC. God was

1 Nathan J. Langerak, "The Indwelling Word," sermon preached on March 19, 2023, in Second Reformed Protestant Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>.

2 Tyler D. Ophoff, "Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (1)," *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 1 (June 1, 2023): 19.

pleased to use Reverend Lanning to lead his people out of the Protestant Reformed Churches and to reform his church, but God does not appear to be pleased to continue to use him for this glorious task of the ongoing reformation of his church.

The theology of Reverend Lanning and company is no different than the theology of our mother church. It is a corruption from the simplicity in Christ. The conditionalism of Reverend Lanning's theology was exposed in a speech entitled "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow," which was given by Rev. N. Langerak as an evangelism lecture at Second Reformed Protestant Church and part of which is published as his editorial this month. I do not intend to reiterate everything that was said in that speech. I will examine the false teaching of "singing with Christ" and the false doctrine that the church does not have Christ singing with her until she has kept the law of exclusive psalmody. I also intend to point out some of the abounding logical fallacies and the deceit that flow out of a doctrine that does not have as its foundation Jesus Christ and his truth. May God grant us his grace and Holy Spirit and make us men that have understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do (1 Chron. 12:32).

Protestant Reformed Theology Resurrected

The theology of Reverend Lanning is the theology and doctrine of our mother, the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is the same theology that in order to have Jesus Christ, one must obey the law. In order to experience covenant fellowship, one must do good works. In order to have Jesus Christ in worship, one must obey the second commandment. For Jesus Christ to sing in the midst of the great congregation, the church must sing only the 150 psalms. Reverend Lanning was not content with the reformation of singing that had already been given to the church of Jesus Christ. It was not enough for him that the church had been given the gift of singing the psalms with understanding. He needed and wanted something more. He grounded the law of exclusive psalmody in the second commandment and then touted it as a reformation of the gospel. In doing so he has plunged himself deep into conditional theology.

The theology of Reverend Lanning hinges on Psalm 22:22 in connection with Hebrews 2:12. He has preached multiple sermons on Psalm 22 as well as a "meditation" in a video blog. Psalm 22:22 reads as follows: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the

midst of the congregation will I praise thee." Reverend Lanning's theology of "singing with Christ" arises out of his exegesis of this text and others over the past two years. He repeatedly preached that Christ is in the midst of the congregation singing, and if the church wants to sing with Christ, then she needs to sing the psalms. He explained what he means by the word "midst" in a sermon and a video blog, teaching that Jesus says to his spiritually assembled church,

I am in your midst. I am next to you. I am on the seat to the left of you and the seat to the right of you. I am here with you. I am behind you, and I am before you. I am in the great congregation. I am right in her midst.³

You come sit here by me, and you hear me sing this to my Father, and I'm going to put that word in your mouth, and you're going to sing with me about my perfect keeping of the law of God and the reward of righteousness that God has given me. And when I sing that my iniquities are risen up before me and my folly is before me, I'm going to tell you to come and sit next to me while I sing this, and I'm singing that about your sins that the Lord has imputed to me.⁴

How Reverend Lanning taught the word "midst," I understand to mean *with*. The elect child of God is sitting in the pew, and Christ is in front of, behind, and to the left and right of him. Christ tells the elect child to come sit next to him. Christ is *with* the elect child of God in the sense that Christ is around his child. There is nothing in the immediate context of the sermon or video blog that would indicate how Christ is all around the child of God. Reverend Lanning here does not speak of true faith. Nor does he speak of Christ actually being in the believer by the Spirit of Christ.

This idea of "singing with Christ" is developed further.

And when the church sings something other than the songs of Zion, when she sings a hymn, a hymn made by man, Jesus is not singing that. A whole bunch of people sing that, but not Jesus. That's the principle of psalm singing in the church. The principle of psalm singing is not first all *what's the rule*. There is a rule: sing the psalms. But the principle is not first of all *what's the rule*. The principle is this: *what does Jesus sing*.

3 Andrew Lanning, "Jesus in the Great Congregation," sermon preached in Zion Reformed Protestant Church on July 10, 2022, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=717222234295602>.

4 Andrew Lanning, "The Gospel of Worship," video blog published on March 26, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Zjze-Gmb-0&t=2369s.

He only sings his own songs. He only sings the songs of Zion. That is what he sings in the great congregation.⁵

And when the church sings those psalms, the Lord Jesus Christ is right in the midst of her, singing along. The Lord Jesus Christ stands at the head of her and sings that song in the midst of his own church, in the midst of his own congregation. That's Hebrews 2:11-12.⁶

Jesus Christ is "with" his church. He is in the midst of her singing psalms in worship. And Jesus *only* sings his own songs. So if the church wants to sing with Jesus, the worship leader, then she must also sing the psalms. Therefore, if the church does not sing exclusively the psalms but sings other portions of the word of God, then Jesus does not sing and will not sing with the church. For Reverend Lanning that is the meaning that the church sings "with" Christ.

If the church does not sing the psalms but sings a *man-made hymn* (a term left undefined), then Jesus is not singing with his church. For Reverend Lanning then, "The church sings alone." When the church sings a man-made song, Jesus does not sing with her.

Man-made is a phrase being used as a scare tactic, when in fact the elements of our worship are made up of many "man-made" things. That something is "man-made" does not necessarily mean that it is a human invention and therefore will worship. A man makes a sermon. A man makes a prayer. Men wrote the Heidelberg Catechism. Men composed versifications of the psalms and put together *The Psalter*. These are things that the Spirit of Christ works in and through the regenerated child of God by the indwelling Spirit.

Now, if the church does the good work of singing the psalms, then her voice joins with Christ's in singing. She does not sing alone when she obeys the law. Is this not the

same false doctrine over which we left our mother? Do good works; obey the law; and in the way of your obedience, you have covenant fellowship. Sing the psalms; and in the way of your psalm singing, Christ sings with you, and you have his covenant fellowship. It is a terrible and comfortless doctrine for the church. Singing is a good work, the end result and fruit of covenant fellowship and union with Jesus Christ. But for Reverend Lanning the church must obey the law before Christ will sing with her. This doctrine leaves the church trying to fulfill a law to have Jesus Christ sing with her. But more specifically, this doctrine leaves the church trying to fulfill a law to

have Jesus Christ and his covenant fellowship. Obey the law; then you will have Christ singing with you. Obey the law; then you will experience covenant fellowship. The Reformed Protestant Churches rejected this doctrine of mother and condemned it as the theology of hell. So also the Reformed Protestant Churches, by God's grace, rejected this new false doctrine, which smells like the sulfur from hell.

The law of exclusive psalmody is set forth as attainable for the church, as is all legalism. Man can obey this law. Man can attain Christ's singing with him. All man needs to do is sing the psalms and nothing else. Man can attain covenant fellowship. All man needs to do is obey the law of God. Man can attain forgiveness of sins by his repenting. Man can attain salvation by his believing. It is all

attainable by man. Forget that one must sing every song perfectly or be damned. Forget that one must repent perfectly or be damned. All one needs to do is sing, obey, or repent, and Christ will have covenant fellowship with him. Reverend Lanning attempts to hedge this and tries to make man nothing by saying things like "of course we do not sing the psalms perfectly" and "thankfully Christ worshiped perfectly for us, and that is our comfort." However, man is still made something by the fact that he can fulfill a law and have Christ sing with him.

This doctrine leaves the church trying to fulfill a law to have Jesus Christ sing with her. But more specifically, this doctrine leaves the church trying to fulfill a law to have Jesus Christ and his covenant fellowship.... The Reformed Protestant Churches rejected this doctrine of mother and condemned it as the theology of hell. So also the Reformed Protestant Churches, by God's grace, rejected this new false doctrine, which smells like the sulfur from hell.

⁵ Lanning, "Jesus in the Great Congregation."

⁶ Andrew Lanning, "Singing the Word of Christ," sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on October 31, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1031212233461017>.

Reverend Lanning has tried to point to the fact that at the end of his May 12, 2023, sermon entitled “The Regulative Principle of Worship,” he preached that Christ fulfilled our worship and that Reverend Lanning did not put the membership of First Reformed Protestant Church under the bondage of the law. But the fact that Christ was added at the end of the sermon does not save the theology of Reverend Lanning. We have been through this argument with friends and family in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Reverend Lanning said what he said in the sermon, and it cannot be talked straight. The orthodox statements of a sermon cannot save the false doctrine. False doctrine corrupts the entire sermon.

The theology of Reverend Lanning is conditional, and his theology also makes the church’s singing with Jesus to be an offer or an invitation. Reverend Lanning, reviewing Michael Lefebvre’s book, *Singing the Songs of Jesus*, writes, “It is King Jesus who takes the Davidic Psalms to his lips and sings them ‘in the midst of the congregation’—and he invites us to join his songs with him.”⁷ Reverend Lanning cautions the reader regarding this invitation later in his book review, although he should have condemned that invitation unequivocally as it flies eerily close to the well-meant offer of the gospel. Reverend Lanning’s theology, which previously was airtight, has become sloppy. At the end of an article in the very next issue of his magazine, he tries to assure his readers who are overwhelmed with questions that there is one answer, and that answer is, “The sweet psalmist is singing in church, and he said that I may come and sing with him.”⁸ Jesus is the worship leader; Jesus is the worshiper; Jesus is singing the psalms—that is what Reverend Lanning taught as the gospel of worship.⁹ Won’t you come join Jesus in singing in the midst of the great congregation?

It is not just Reverend Lanning teaching false doctrine. Mr. Neil Meyer wrote the following in his protest to First’s consistory, which protest Reverend Lanning published without qualification in the *Reformed Pavilion* and thereby approved of the protest:

The doxology [“Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow”], in its content, excludes verses 13 and 14 of Psalm 148. The doxology does not take into consideration those last two verses of the Psalm.

13. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.
14. He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the Lord.

Conclusion: The doxology does not sing verses 13 and 14. It leaves them out. It leaves Christ out. It leaves the saints out. *We do not have access to the Father.* The praise of His saints does not reach His ears. Jesus Christ is displaced.¹⁰

Does that not make the Reformed ear tingle? *We do not have access to the Father.* Those words should never enter into the heart of a Reformed man, let alone come across his lips or onto the printed page. The only way one can understand this statement is that “Praise God” somehow leaves out Christ by leaving out verses 13 and 14; therefore, when one sings “Praise God,” there is no access unto God. Is not all scripture Jesus Christ (John 5:39)? Is he not the eternal Word (1:1)? I do not even know how one could talk this statement orthodox. My singing is not my access to the Father. My singing all the verses of a psalm is not my access to the Father. I do not need to sing all the right verses to make sure I have access to the Father. The access of the elect child of God to the Father is through Jesus Christ by faith alone (14:6). The theology of Mr. Meyer is the theology of man. It is the same conditional theology of our mother that the way to the Father includes our obedience but now with the good work of singing as the way to the Father.

Through His Church

Jesus Christ does not sing “with” the church. Christ does not preach “with” the minister, as if Christ is to the left and the right of the minister and if the minister wants Christ to preach with him then he must preach what Christ is preaching. Christ actually preaches by his word and Spirit. Christ does not pray “with” the child of God. It is the indwelling Spirit of Christ who cries out, “Abba, Father.” Christ does not sing “with” the child of God. Jesus Christ does not do anything “with” his church in the way Reverend Lanning explains it. Jesus Christ does not stand with the congregation behind, in the front, to the left, and to the right. He is not with the church in that sense. Christ never does things with us, but he does things for us, in us, and through us to the glory of God. Christ does these things in and through his child by his Spirit.

7 Andrew Lanning, “Book Review,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 3 (April 29, 2023): 31.

8 Andrew Lanning, “FAQ,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 4 (May 6, 2023): 20.

9 See Andrew Lanning, “The Gospel of Worship.”

10 Neil Meyer, “Protest,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 2 (April 22, 2023): 24–25, emphasis added.

That is the whole meaning of faith. The elect child of God is united to Christ, and the life of Jesus Christ flows in and through the child of God. Scripture repeatedly speaks of faith as being “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) or “in Christ” (Acts 24:24; 1 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 1:12). We are in Christ by faith alone. We are one with him as our covenant head and mediator. The church is the body of Christ, and she is one with her head. The two are indistinguishable from one another. Christ sings, and the church sings because Christ is singing through her by his Spirit. The life of the church is Jesus Christ living in and through her. His life courses through her body. Christ does not worship “with” his church, but he accomplished that worship for her and worships God through her by his Spirit.

How is Jesus Christ in the midst of the great congregation? Jesus Christ lives in and through his church by his Spirit, and the church of Jesus Christ worships and sings praises unto the name of God. The glorious means is a true faith whereby we are engrafted into Christ and receive all his benefits (Lord’s Day 7). This true faith, wrought in the heart of the elect child by the word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost, regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life in love and service to God to glorify him as his friend-servant in the covenant (Belgic Confession 24). The purpose of singing is to glorify God. There cannot be anything further to our singing or obeying any law than to render thanksgiving (1 Thess. 5:18).

And Jesus Christ is the church itself. He is the glorious latter house of God (Hag. 2:9). Christ is the temple of God, and he builds up his church by his Spirit to be living members thereof (Eph. 2:19–22). Christ calls his church together. He compacts it as one body. He feeds his body with his own voice. He preserves his body to eternal life by the gospel.

The gospel of salvation regarding worship is that Christ worshiped perfectly for his people. He sang and prayed perfectly, so that there is not a condition that needs to be met in order to have Christ singing with his people or in order to have his covenant fellowship. Christ is our access unto the Father. “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Rom. 5:2). He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). There is no obedience to the law that is necessary for any aspect of salvation. Further, without true faith one can never worship God in the way that is pleasing to him. We of ourselves will never be pleasing to God. It is only his Son who is pleasing to him.

Logical Fallacies Abound

There are two men who write in the *Reformed Pavilion*, and their writings are chock-full of logical fallacies and deceit in order to avoid answering important questions and to defend their false doctrine. False doctrine always makes men unethical, and their writings are the fruits of not having the truth or standing on right doctrine.

The principle of singing exclusively the psalms in worship leads to many uncomfortable questions for Reverend Lanning. Reverend Lanning studiously avoids answering these questions by erecting straw men. A straw man fallacy occurs when someone takes another person’s argument or point, distorts it or exaggerates it in some kind of extreme way, and then attacks the extreme distortion, as if that is really the claim the first person made. One such question was,

Is it really the sin of image worship to sing the Lord’s prayer or some other portion of scripture in worship, so that doing so is equivalent to the Israelites’ dancing naked around the golden calf?¹¹

Reverend Lanning’s answer should have been yes, it is idol worship to sing the Lord’s prayer. This should be one of the easiest questions to answer, according to the principle. But Reverend Lanning considered it the hardest question, one that he claimed to have wrestled with for weeks. Understanding the problem that he runs into by calling the Lord Jesus Christ’s perfect prayer set to tune and meter idol worship, he went to work dismantling the question:

The difficulty of the question is not that it makes a good point but that there are two subtle errors in the question.¹²

Reverend Lanning waxed eloquent for two and a half pages without ever directly answering the question. A simple yes or no would have sufficed. Reverend Lanning erected a straw man, and then he whacked away at that straw man. It is a faulty question. Whack. It makes a false equivalence. Whack. It is backward reasoning. Whack. Doesn’t this feel familiar?

Reverend Lanning also falls victim to the red herring fallacy, which is a diversionary tactic that avoids the key issues, often by avoiding opposing arguments rather than addressing them. A great example of this is calling valid questions about exclusive psalmody “yabuts” and “wuddubouts.”

11 Andrew Lanning, “FAQ,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 1 (April 15, 2023): 35.

12 Lanning, “FAQ,” 35.

There are many, many questions being asked about exclusive psalmody that take the form of, ‘Yeah, but what about...?’ They are a whole class of questions that we could call *yabuts* and *wuddubouts*. These questions raise some apparent difficulty with the principle of exclusive psalmody in order to probe the principle or even to deny the principle.¹³

Instead of answering the difficult questions, he dismissed them altogether.

Reverend Lanning is scared of questions in an environment he cannot control. Previously, he would welcome questions and controversy. At the organizational meeting of First Reformed Protestant Church in 2021, Reverend Lanning and the elders dedicated the majority of the meeting to answering questions from friend and foe alike. How things have changed. Look no further than the night of the “Act of Separation and Joining” meeting. An open invitation had been sent to the entire congregation of First Reformed Protestant Church to attend the meeting and have an opportunity to ask questions. I took the invitation at its word, as did many other members of the congregation. But Reverend Lanning, in a masterful way, swept us all aside by proclaiming that only those who intended to sign the “Act” may ask questions. Stunning. Political. Deceitful. Reverend Lanning would not allow us to ask questions. He was still our minister at the time, and we were still his sheep; yet he showed no love for his flock. If he were standing on the truth, what would there be to fear? The truth shouts from the rooftops. The truth is like a lion; it does not need defending; it needs to be unleashed. He did not want any questions because he does not have any answers.

Mr. Dewey Engelsma is not immune to the slew of logical fallacies. He has resorted to conducting ad hominem attacks and making hasty generalizations. Ad hominem means *against the man*, and this type of fallacy is sometimes called name calling or the personal attack fallacy. This type of fallacy occurs when someone attacks the person instead of attacking his or her argument. An example would be saying that Reverend Langerak engineered the whole controversy and that Reverend Bomers and myself were doing his bidding.

Mr. Engelsma makes a lot of hasty generalizations. A hasty generalization occurs when one makes a conclusion based on insufficient or biased evidence and then rushes to that conclusion before one has all the relevant facts. Mr. Engelsma writes as though he were present at all the meetings and deliberations of the consistory when, in fact, he was not present at all. All he has done

is take in biased information from the three elders and Reverend Lanning. Mr. Engelsma cannot possibly give an honest account of what happened. His judgment of what occurred in the consistory room is obscured. Mr. Engelsma can distort, twist, lie, and deceive. No need to gather the complete facts. He has justified himself in his own actions and behavior, but he condemns his opponents’ supposedly distasteful behavior.

Mr. Engelsma claims that First Reformed Protestant Church is full of bloody crimes and violence. He writes,

It is striking how easily the members of First RPC step over the bodies of Reverend Lanning, Steve VanDyke, Paul Starrett, and Neil Meyer on their way into church. It reminds you of another denomination with which we are very familiar.¹⁴

Is that an accurate representation of what happened or a caricature of the events? The consistory judged Reverend Lanning’s doctrine as false according to the word of God and the confessions. Reverend Lanning was suspended for that false doctrine. Deuteronomy 13 is a scriptural description of what really happened, but I quote only verses 10 and 11:

10. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.
11. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.

What about Mr. Meyer and Mr. Van Dyke? They also were stoned to death righteously. These two men resigned their Christ-appointed offices and were deposed for faithless desertion of office. Mr. Engelsma and Reverend Lanning proclaim that these men were cut down defending the truth. But these men fled the battlefield, and now that behavior is being justified and actively defended. “The consistory behaved so unrighteously that two other elders, Elder Meyer and Elder Van Dyke, had to resign. This is understandable.”¹⁵ When things get too tough, it is okay for elders to resign? They may lay down their Christ-appointed offices? It is understandable that they resigned, according to Mr. Engelsma, because of such unrighteousness.

I hope nothing too difficult makes its way into the consistory room of Reverend Lanning and the new church. I ask anyone who has joined themselves to this new church, do you want elders who will abandon you when men act too “unrighteously” against them?

13 Andrew Lanning, “FAQ,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 4 (May 6, 2023): 19.

14 Dewey Engelsma, “How Did This Happen? (1): Introduction,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 4 (May 6, 2023): 9.

15 Dewey Engelsma, “How Did This Happen? (3),” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 7 (May 27, 2023): 8.

Now Mr. Meyer and Mr. Van Dyke are playing elder. They resigned from their Christ-appointed offices and now intrude into the office. Christ will not use these men in his church. Every vow they take on their lips is blasphemy against the name of God; every vow they ever take on their lips will mean nothing.

Every officebearer in the Reformed Protestant Churches has made a vow before the face of God, and what that means is when we sign that Formula of Subscription, we are attaching Jehovah to our vow. Jehovah and our vow are united. Jehovah and our vow are inextricably linked—that’s what we are saying when we say, “Before the Lord...”

The then elders [of Sovereign RPC] almost immediately left the church, almost immediately. They took their papers and were gone. That’s not what they vowed to do. They live today as impenitent oath breakers. Impenitent oath breakers. They blaspheme every morning when they wake up. Every breath they draw is blasphemy against Jehovah...

They took the name of God and tied it to their promise, “I will acquiesce,” which means by not acquiescing, they declare with every word they speak, “God is a dirty liar.” That’s all he is; he’s a dirty liar...

God will make it impossible for vows to mean anything in those churches. You can count on that. God will make it impossible for vows to mean anything because that church or that denomination or whatever comes of it, was formed through impenitent blasphemy, impenitent vow-breaking. Baptism vows will not mean anything; they can’t; God won’t let them. Marriage vows won’t mean anything; they can’t; God won’t let them. Ordination vows won’t mean anything; they can’t; God won’t let them. I tremble when I say that because I’ve taken vows too and you have too.

What a thing to stand before the face of God and man and to say, “I know what I’ve vowed, but I don’t care. I’m going to do what I want now.”¹⁶

Now, the opponents will holler that this sermon was referring specifically to the Formula Subscription vow. That may be so, but a vow is a vow. And when an elder is ordained, he makes another vow, that is, that he is lawfully called of God’s church, and consequently of God himself to his respective holy office. He promises agreeably to said

doctrine [of the Old and New Testament as the only Word of God and perfect doctrine of salvation] and to discharge his respective office as described in the Form for Ordination. He vows to walk in all godliness and to submit himself, in case he should become remiss in his duty, to the admonition of the church. These men broke these vows by resigning and therefore deserting their Christ-appointed office.

Mr. Engelsma hurls a lot of slanderous accusations against the church of Jesus Christ. Mr. Engelsma’s articles are full of this type of writing. But they are all noise and no content. The best thing he can come up with is to say that we sound like the Protestant Reformed Churches. Mr. Engelsma can call us the Protestant Reformed Churches and claim that our tone and manner are worse, but his *theology* is the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches. He was never rid of the Pharisaism of mother (Prov. 26:11). Mr. Engelsma has his foot-washings now; he has his law (Matt. 15:1–9). Let Mr. Engelsma thrash around on the pages of the *Reformed Pavilion*.

Conclusion

The theology of Reverend Lanning and his church is the same conditional theology of our mother. He took his false doctrine and deceived a slew of men, women, and children into believing the lie. Everything that he has done over the past couple of months has been his own will, and he contends against the church of Jesus Christ.

Let Reverend Lanning and Mr. Engelsma heed the words of Theodore Beza:

It belongs, in truth, to the church of God, in the name of which I address you, to *suffer* blows, not to *strike* them. But at the same time let it be your pleasure to remember that the church is an anvil which has worn out many a hammer.¹⁷

Reverend Lanning and Mr. Engelsma can keep pounding away at the church of Jesus Christ with the hammers of their own wills, but the church of Jesus Christ will wear out these men.

This is all I intend to write on this topic for the time being. I had intended to write more, but the theology of Reverend Lanning is a mess; it is a Gordian knot. And the best thing to do with that knot is to cut it off and throw it away. There is no need to continue to wallow in the mud. His theology is now the theology of mother. The gospel is beautifully simple, and Reverend Lanning has been corrupted from that simplicity.

May the Lord preserve us in the gospel of sovereign grace to his glory alone.

—TDO

¹⁶ See Andrew Lanning, “Martyr,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on January 29, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?keyword=72773&keyworddesc=&currsection=sermonsource&SourceOnly=true&keywordwithin=martyr&x=0&y=0>.

¹⁷ Herman Hanko, *Portraits of Faithful Saints*, (1999; repr., Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2018), 183.

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

SACRIFICES (3): I AM THE WAY

The Word of Jehovah

Jehovah speaks. In himself the triune God speaks. The *Logos*, the Word, was in the beginning. And the *Logos* was with God. And the *Logos* was God. *Eternally*, God speaks in himself. Apart from the temporal world that he called into existence by the Word and Breath of his mouth, God speaks in himself. None gave him his speech. He possesses it of himself. And in himself he speaks *of* himself. He expresses by speech the entire fullness of his infinite mind. And in himself he speaks *to* himself. He hears the word of himself that he speaks to himself, and he hears it with great delight and holy zeal. Speech and fellowship are inextricably bound together, for they find their source in the triune God.

When a man has something particularly close to his heart, he speaks within himself. He deliberates in his mind that which bears upon his heart. He converses within his soul. And out of the abundance of his heart flows speech to his beloved.

But how can the thoughts and utterances of a man be compared to those of the one who is of and in and through himself?

Man's mind will flit and flutter from thought to thought as he is stimulated by inputs from within and from without his being. But the living God comprehends *all* things in his eternal present. His understanding is infinite. His thoughts cannot be counted and are more in number than the sand. His thoughts are a great deep and higher than all the earth. And there is no change in the activity or content of his mind. There is no increase or decrease of his precious thoughts. The counsel of Jehovah stands forever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations (Ps. 33:11). He is I AM.

Such an incomprehensible gulf exists between the utterances of man, an earthy soul, and the utterances of the living God, the majesty on high. Lest a man sound like a lunatic or become tongue-tied, his speech is limited to a solitary subject. But consider the Holy One, who, seeing and knowing the infinite goodness of his divine

being, ceaselessly proclaims all truth to himself in his constant fullness!

Who can know the thoughts of God's heart but God the Spirit, who searches out the deep things of God? Who can bear the weight of his speech when he declares all the fullness of his infinite perfections? Who can fathom the love and zeal Jehovah has for himself? Sooner would a worm comprehend the mind of a man, than a man, the living God. God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are his ways our ways.

Jehovah speaks.

Outside himself the triune God speaks. Not out of necessity does he speak out from his divine and blessed being but according to his sovereign and free good pleasure. That eternal and uncreated Word was spoken creatively. That eternal and uncreated Word called forth all things into existence. That eternal and uncreated Word was, "Let there be light." And there was light. By the *Logos* were all things made, and without him was not anything made that was made.

That eternal and uncreated Word is continually spoken into the created world, upholding all things by his power and wisdom. And just as the content of the Word within God has a divine theme and tune, so too the content of the Word outside God. The speech of God throughout the cosmos, in all its unending variations, ever concentrates on the living God. By him and through him do the heavens declare the glory of God. By him and through him, there is no speech nor language where God's glory is not heard. And though he speaks outside himself, yet through the creation he still speaks unto himself.

Who is the man who thinks himself to be great in the earth? Let him give ear. Can you discern at once and in each succeeding moment the speech of creation? Perhaps you may walk outside in the cool of the morning to hear the chirps of a few finches and the coos of a pair of doves. But give thou audience to the remaining one hundred billion fowls of the air as Jehovah does. Give thou audience to the fullness of their speech at each successive moment as Jehovah does. Give thou audience and discern the speech of Jehovah through them as Jehovah does. Now, give thou

attendance as well to the praises of the forest trees, the stars of the heaven, the fishes of the sea, and every other creature as Jehovah does. You cannot. And even if you visited every last square inch of the cosmos, you would still not hear all that Jehovah hears. For he plays upon instruments that fall outside your auditory range. The creation exists not for your purposes but for the glory of the triune God. "Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him" (Ps. 33:8).

Jehovah speaks.

But man contradicts. Man of the dust by his speech slanders the Lord from heaven.

For man's thoughts are antithetical to God's thoughts. Man, whose mind and will were tenderly formed from the dust of the earth by Jehovah's hand, is a rebel who viciously turned all the powers of his intellect against his creator. God made man to know and to think God's great thoughts after God. But man despised that excellency and has now become enamored with his "philosophical" musings. He claims that he sees, but his mind is blind. Having forfeited God's gifts, man entailed upon himself horrible darkness. Jehovah knows the thoughts of man that they are vanity. God sees the wickedness of man and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually.

And the problem with man is that he will not be quiet. Since his inward part is very wicked, his throat is an open sepulcher. He speaks the speech of death. He has a chronic case of morning breath, and all that he utters is revoltingly putrid. God so created man that what God and man spoke was one. They sang the praises of God together in perfect harmony. They declared the truth of God with one another. Joyful and peaceful was their fellowship together. But then another sound came into the garden. It was the speech of Father Lie, the adversary, the slanderer. The motif of that speech was "glory be unto *me*." And man lusted for that new speech. It sank into his heart and then spewed forth from his lips. The beautiful melody that God had placed upon the tongue of man was turned to the nauseating sound of a fourth-grade class learning to play the recorder. And man loved that lie. He broke God's covenant, allied himself with the devil, and began hissing at God as the serpent. A fool is man and rightly deserving of hell.

And truly he will go to hell, unless God is pleased to speak a word of grace into his heart and to teach man the way of life.

The Word in the Garden

In sweet communion with the living God, Adam and Eve knew a special word of God's covenant. It was the living word of God's blessing. That blessing rested upon them and upon all of creation. That blessing caused them to experience the favor of God. But when they turned from God, who was their life and only good, they consequently knew a different word. It was the living word of God's curse. All that the world could hear was the testimony of Jehovah's wrath against the ungodliness of men. It was the speech of condemnation. Doom thundered. Death opened its terrible abyss. And gloom shut up any way of escape.

Fear and shame then dominated the minds of our first parents. They foolishly attempted to cover themselves with aprons of leaves, the works of their own wicked hands. They trembled in sheer terror when they heard the presence of God and fled from him. Their actions were the evil fruits of their fallen natures. And when confronted by Jehovah, they continued in wicked pride and vain self-preservation. It is true that Adam admitted that he had eaten of the fruit of the tree that God had prohibited. But that admission was not repentance. It was not the admission of full responsibility for the sin he had committed. Rather, he began the blame

game. He blamed the woman, from whose hand he had eaten. "She made me do it. Let the guilt be on Eve!" He also rather slyly but indiscreetly blamed God. "Thou art the one who gave her to me. Let the guilt be on thee!"

Man in his sin does not stop speaking. He speaks a word of excuse. Perhaps he may grant that he did something wrong, but in his disobedience he will never fully own his sin. The sciences of man give him plenty of excuses. Psychology tells him that he is a victim of his environment and under circumstances outside his control. Biology tells him that he is just wired a certain way. Philosophy tells him that any resultant "good" from his error far outweighs the bad. But man will never of himself say, "I sinned." Period. And then shut his mouth and sorrow after a godly sort.

Terrible darkness came upon man for his rebellion against God in the garden. In the plagues upon Egypt, God sent a darkness of such a kind that it could be felt. Pharaoh and his people sensed the condemnation of God's righteous judgment slip around their necks and tighten itself as a noose. That darkness was suffocating

God spoke a word that man had not yet heard or known but that had been prepared from before the foundation of the world. It was the word of the gospel. The protevangel. The *moeder belofte* (mother promise) of Genesis 3:15.

and horrible, the blackness of the pit of hell. But man in the garden felt that blackness in the depths of his being. He had plunged the whole creation into a labyrinth of night with no way out. From the standpoint of Adam and Eve, there was only wrath and a fearful looking toward condemnation and fiery indignation.

But lo! Jehovah speaks.

A brilliant beacon of hope shone into the gloom of Adam's night. A light to overcome the darkness. A light to which the darkness is strictly subservient. God spoke into the fallen world plunged into blackness, subject to vanity and the bondage of corruption. God spoke a word that man had not yet heard or known but that had been prepared from before the foundation of the world. It was the word of the gospel. The protevangel. The *moeder belofte* (mother promise) of Genesis 3:15. It was a word of glad tidings and great joy, for God declared that the trembling man and woman were of his party and were his friends. It was a word of condemnation to their enemy, for God by the seed of the woman, his Son in our flesh, would crush Satan. It was the word of Christ. It was the Word that is Christ.

As a testimony and sign of what was needed to restore fellowship with God, God offered a sacrifice in the presence of Adam and Eve. An innocent victim was slain. Its blood was spilled. And to cover the shame of his redeemed friend-servants, God clothed them with the righteous covering of Jesus Christ. Even then God spoke in Christ, saying, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Adam indeed fell. Yet when he fell, he fell upon Christ. By that word God declared unto man that there was no more condemnation, and man had peace with God.

Some have an interpretation of that word of grace in the garden. It is the same interpretation that they give to John 14:6. Their interpretation is this: we experience fellowship with God through faith, on the basis of what Christ has done, *and in the way of our obedience*.

But where is man's obedience here? Even while man was busy contradicting and hating God, God came to man with a wondrous and most gracious word. Unto whom did God restore fellowship with himself? It was not one who had repented. It was not one who had a single work to offer. It was not even one who was searching for reconciliation. It was one who was in himself ungodly.

Do you now say that the experience of fellowship with God is in the way of our obedience? No! You add to the truth and lie against it! You mingle grace with works! You contort the simplicity of the gospel and shut the kingdom against those who would enter! No!

The word of God from the garden onward has been this: Christ. Christ is the way unto the Father. Christ is

the only way unto the Father. You experience fellowship with God in Christ. Period. That is the word that Jehovah speaks. It is the word that Jehovah spoke at sundry times and in divers manners by the prophets. It is a word that he developed and unfolded at critical junctures in Old Testament history. And in these last days, it is the word that he spoke by his Son.

The Word in the Context of the Sacrifices

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." This is also the living word of Jehovah that he speaks in the context of the Levitical sacrifices.

Here we arrive at the main point of this article. The five sacrifices under consideration—the burnt, meat, peace, sin, and trespass offerings—are given in Leviticus 1–7. Yet what transpired immediately prior to the prescription of those sacrifices, what is recorded in the latter chapters of the book of Exodus, is not without utmost significance. In this context Jehovah has a word to speak. And that word is this: you have covenant fellowship with me *through Christ* and through him alone.

In Exodus 24 we are witnesses of a most remarkable marriage ceremony, that marriage of Jehovah to his betrothed Israel.

Who is this honored bride of the living God? God did not claim her from among the great and noble in the earth. She was not discovered in the palace courts or found peacefully bathing along the banks of the Nile. No, God set his love upon the woman who was despised and rejected of men. Her estate was among the beasts of burden. Scorched black by her labor under the sun, filthy with the dust of the earth, weary from labor under the cruel taskmasters of Pharaoh, she had all but perished. Unto this wretch Jehovah came. Over her he spread his banners of love. In the presence of her enemies, he proclaimed his blessing. And in judgment he came against her persecutors with plagues and wrath. He came in the destroyer who slew Egypt's firstborn, while hiding her under the house sealed with his blood. He drew her from her misery. He adorned her with rich spoils of victory. He carved a path for her through the sea, and with the same stroke crushed the hosts of Pharaoh. He bore her on the back of eagles' wings and brought her to himself under the shadow of Mount Sinai.

And then commenced a glorious wedding ceremony!

There from the mount, the Lord declared his steadfast love and commitment to his bride. "I am Jehovah thy God, who hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." The Lord did not offer himself. He did not inquire whether she would consent to be his bride. He *declared* it from the mount, sovereignly

and according to his eternal love for her. She belonged to him. She always belonged to him. And thus he entered into covenant with her. He communicated to her his law, showing his bride that since she was married to him, she was obliged always to love and obey and reverence him. She had to love him from her heart and with her whole being. And what a privilege this was! For her husband was not a mere man but the eternal and almighty Lord of heaven. And further, he assured her of his promise that he would bring her into a rich and blessed land where they would dwell together.

Then behold what adornment the Holy One of Israel provided for his bride. Sacrifices having already been offered and their blood collected, God through Moses sprinkled¹ the people and clothed them in righteousness. This sign was not meaningless to Israel, for the sacrificial blood had saved them not a few months prior from the sword of the destroyer. By this God testified to his bride that she lived only because an innocent creature had died in her stead. She was in herself a polluted and condemnable slave woman. Yet eternally beloved was she in Christ, and thus her husband had cleansed her and presented her unto himself holy and without blame.

With awe of both his terrible majesty and bowels of compassion, the betrothed woman uttered her vow of commitment to him. "All that Jehovah hath said will we do, and be obedient." And then she ascended the mount in her leaders, Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders. She came into God's heavenly presence for the consummation of the wedding. She saw him enthroned upon a pavement of blue. From her low and miserable estate of building bricks of clay and straw, she by marriage to the king of kings had been greatly exalted and made to rest upon the sapphire bricks of heaven. And there with her husband she dined and communed with a heart of joy and peace.

But that was not the end of Jehovah's grace toward his

bride. After the wedding feast Moses again ascended into the mount, that time to receive instructions concerning the building of the tabernacle. God had prepared for his beloved a house, where he would meet and fellowship with her in the camp! Thus Moses received the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary that stands eternally in God's living decree. Moses was given the form of the house, the ark with all the accompanying articles, and the priestly service for that house. Jehovah revealed what is his delight

and good pleasure, namely, to provide for Israel a dwelling of love, a meeting place of fellowship, an abode of covenant unity. God and his peculiar people made perfect in one.

And what did the bride of God do while Moses abode in the mount? Certainly, she had to be eagerly and chastely awaiting the return of Moses with the words of her husband. Certainly, she had to be looking every day in anticipation toward the heights of the mount. Certainly, this must have been true.

What did that bride do? She turned from her God and went the way of the whore. She broke off her earrings of gold, the precious gifts that her Lord had given to her when he spoiled her enemies, and she fashioned for herself a cow. She declared a feast day unto Jehovah, rising up early to bring her offerings. She fellowshipped with her idol, eating and drinking under its

snout. And then she stripped off her clothes and arose to play.

Oh, miserable and wretched Israel! How horribly unfaithful was she! Despicable. Treacherous. Crooked. Abominable. Worthy of every notorious epithet was she.

Let us stand aloof and condemn her...

Is that your response? Then you do not yet know your misery.

No, Israel did not want to be faithful. Israel could not be faithful. For man is a spiritual corpse. He is prone by nature to hate God, inclined to all evil, and incapable of any good. And that is who we are. Man is black. Man is

The word of God from the garden onward has been this: Christ. Christ is the way unto the Father. Christ is the only way unto the Father. You experience fellowship with God in Christ. Period. That is the word that Jehovah speaks. It is the word that Jehovah spoke at sundry times and in divers manners by the prophets. It is a word that he developed and unfolded at critical junctures in Old Testament history. And in these last days, it is the word that he spoke by his Son.

1 *Sprinkled*, or *קָטַף*. Let the immersionist quarrel with scripture and Moses, who find sprinkling wholly adequate to signify the washing of the blood of Christ. Let the proponent of believer's baptism quarrel with scripture and Moses, for the children are sprinkled together with the parents.

Vantablack. Israel had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt. But Israel had to know of a more terrible slavery, that of sin. And scripture all the more presses this truth of man's faithlessness upon our consciences with symbols. Moses was in the mount for forty days and nights. That is literal. That is also symbolic. That number testifies of the absolute limit of man and his total inability to obey.² Israel had made her vows to Jehovah, and instantly she broke them. The law entered, and sin immediately abounded.

And do not miss this either. God had additional instructions for Moses after giving to him the sacred patterns for the tabernacle and just prior to sending him down the mount after those forty days and nights. God told Moses to remind the people to keep his Sabbath. That Sabbath they had to observe, and everyone who defiled it had to be put to death. Israel's husband delivered her from her excruciating toil under Pharaoh and brought her into his own covenant rest and fellowship. Already Israel had a taste of that blessed Sabbath. But even while God was giving that instruction concerning the Sabbath, Israel was already busy desecrating it.

Now, who was it with whom Israel had to do? With Jehovah, who is a consuming fire.

Earlier, God had come down on the mount to speak to his people the law of his covenant. He had come with thundering and lightning. He had come with a thick cloud and the voice of a trumpet exceedingly loud. The fire of Jehovah had set the mountain ablaze, billowing up to the midst of heaven with thick smoke. At his presence the earth had convulsed exceedingly and melted. So terrible was the sight that even Moses shook with fear. Then issuing from the fire came ten words. Ten commandments, the sum of which was to love God perfectly from the heart and to love the neighbor as oneself. And the people could not stand it a moment longer. "Let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Ex. 20:19).

And then they mocked his law.

Wonder of wonders: the sons of Jacob were not consumed.

They were not consumed because there was another in their midst who made that vow of obedience with

them. When Moses came and told the people all the words of Jehovah and all his judgments, all the people answered with one voice, "All the words which Jehovah hath said will we do." And at the head of those voices was Christ, the servant of Jehovah. Christ pledged his obedience; and when he came into the world, he said, "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). And it was his obedient life that was imputed unto the Israelites, and it was his precious blood that purged his people from their sins. And that seal of the covenant testified that it was not their faithfulness but that it was God's faithfulness over against their unfaithfulness that they were his covenant people.

But God was not done teaching his bride.

The people had forsaken every right to covenant fellowship with him. Being exceedingly sinful, they could not simply walk into God's holy sanctuary in themselves, lest they be consumed. By their sin they deserved to be cast as far away from God as possible. Thus Moses was to seek Jehovah outside the camp. Moses took the tent of meeting and pitched it far off from the people.

There Moses interceded for the people. (Christ's high priestly intercession stands on the foreground here, waiting to be exegeted. Perhaps this is a topic I can explore in the future.) There Moses was

assured by God that God would go forth and lead their host into the land of promise with his presence. And in the cleft of the mount, God passed by Moses, uncovered to him his backside, proclaimed his name, and showed to Moses his glory that was ready to be revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Revigorated by the promises of God, Moses picked up the work of building God's house. And when Moses had finished the work, Jehovah's cloud descended and filled the tabernacle with glory.

But how shall the people experience covenant fellowship with God? He abides in his house, but how shall they approach him? Is it this, that fellowship with God is through faith, on the basis of what Christ has done, *and in the way of their obedience?*

No! Through the context that we have just considered, God again spoke in Christ, saying, "I am the way, the

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unto himself. He gave the way.
The *only* way. He gave Christ,
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2 The way to arrive at the understanding of forty is that of four times ten. Four represents the earthly creation from the viewpoint of its fullness. Ten represents completion according to God's determinative counsel. Thus forty is the limit of creation, at the head of which is man. God gave the two tables of stone *after* forty days and nights, thus signifying the creature's inability to keep his holy law.

truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

For when the book of Exodus closes, what comes next? The sacrifices! God showed what is needed to experience covenant fellowship with himself. God opened the way of access unto himself. He gave the way. The *only* way. He gave Christ, embodied in the types and shadows of the offerings. The way unto the Father was made manifest, and that way explicitly excludes any obedience of man.

The Word Made Flesh

Jehovah speaks.

That uncreated Word also came into the world. The *Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us. That eternal and living Word of God made himself of no reputation, took to himself our human nature, and spoke in the language of men. And the words that the Father gave unto him, he spoke. What he saw and heard in heaven, that he testified.

“I go away,” said the Lord to his disciples (and to us). “I go to prepare a place for you. And I will come again to receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know where I go and the way that I go.”

But Thomas was confused. “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How then can we know the way?”

“I am the way,” replied the Lord plainly and clearly. “No man comes unto the Father, but by me. And you know and see the Father if you know me.”

Then Philip was confused. “Lord, show us the Father, and it will be enough for us.”

Simple and carnal were the disciples. They had been with the Lord during his whole earthly ministry. They had heard him at length. They had seen him with their eyes and looked upon him and handled him with their hands. Yet here they blurted out their ignorance. “If only we could know the way! If only we could be seated with the angels in heaven and get a glimpse of the Father!” They perceived in their minds a vast gulf between them and God. They desired to bridge that gap. They wanted to enjoy covenant fellowship with their God. But they knew not how.

“Behold *me*,” said the Lord. “Where are your thoughts and your minds? Do not look around you. Do not look within you. ‘Me’ does not refer to some other man you esteem. ‘Me’ does not refer to any work that you do. If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. For I am the one in whom dwells the fullness of God and in whom God reveals his whole heart and counsel. Behold *me*. Behold me *only*. I am the way.”

Or as Luther puts it,

If you know and see Me, then you also know and see the way, and you must not worry any longer. You must not stare at Me as a cow stares at a new door.³

Simple and carnal were the disciples. And so are we.

Do not give heed to the man who says that the way unto the Father includes obedience. Do not give heed to the synod that teaches that our experience of covenant fellowship is in the way of our obedience. When these become your doctrine, Christ is transformed into Moses, and your attention is fixed upon yourself. That doctrine is deadly, for already by nature we are inclined to search out within ourselves just a little goodness on which we can stand. We want just one little work for assurance that we belong to the Father. Rather, repeatedly we must be told that all we need is Christ, for in us, that is, in our flesh, dwells not one good thing. Discard all other knowledge to know absolutely nothing other than the excellency of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

“But,” you say, “I am a most miserable sinner.” Indeed. And Christ knows of your wretchedness far better than you do. But do not let Satan harass you and tear your eyes from Christ. Satan will quickly persuade you that you must take recourse to yourself and devise your own way of reconciliation to God. Satan will quickly convince you of the idea that the way unto covenant fellowship with God includes your obedience. With ease Satan will convince you that you experience covenant fellowship with God only in the way of obedience. No. “*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*” That you are a big sinner—is this not exactly why Christ speaks these words to you?

Jehovah speaks.

And so, as we examine the doctrines and various aspects of the Levitical sacrifices, we do not blankly stare at them as a cow stares at a new gate. God reveals to us his way. He confirms us in his holy gospel. He shows us that Christ is all that we need to know of his love, grace, faithfulness, righteousness, and wisdom. Christ laid down his life and freely shed his blood for the satisfaction of God’s perfect justice. And Christ declared, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

He did not speak these words on his own authority. He spoke them on the authority of his Father who said from heaven, “This is my beloved Son. Hear him.”

—LB

³ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 14–16*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 33.

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

BLINDSIDED: A CONDEMNATION OF EXCLUSIVE PSALMODY

The sermon based on Colossians 3:16 that was preached in Second Reformed Protestant Church by Rev. Nathan Langerak under the theme “The Indwelling Word”¹ has received intense scrutiny by the proponents of exclusive psalmody. All of a sudden, the minister who preached that sermon is no longer a faithful minister of Jesus Christ, but he is a fearmonger and a cruel abuser of the sheep, and to some he is even a schismatic person.

Many received that preached word in faith with rejoicing as the very word of Christ unto his beleaguered church. But there were also many others who heard that word and received it in unbelief, so that they now speak against that word. They seek to tear at that word and make that word out to be “an uncertain sound.”²

Many at Second Reformed Protestant Church walked to the back of church after the sermon that Sunday evening and spoke with one another about how much they needed to be instructed from the word of God concerning the issue of exclusive psalmody and even how the sermon was revealing for them. I was one of them. I had been instructed, I had been corrected, and I had been comforted in the truth of the word of God.

However, that was not all that I felt that Sunday evening. I was left surprised and nearly speechless regarding an issue about which I thought I had a basic understanding before that sermon was even preached. Shame covered me as a wet blanket and weighed me down that Sunday evening. And why? Because I had been blindsided. I had been given a false narrative of the issue by someone whom I thought I could trust. That someone was Rev. Andrew Lanning.

A few days prior to that Sunday evening, I sat down with Reverend Lanning via a zoom call concerning a couple of questions about exclusive psalmody. Before

then I had not yet taken the time to listen to the two recent sermons by Reverend Lanning in which he preached exclusive psalmody based on the second commandment.³ Admittedly, that was foolish on my part. In my ignorance I figured that if anyone would be able to tell me honestly what all the fuss was about at First Reformed Protestant Church, it would be Reverend Lanning. When I asked him about the elders who would not shake his hand after the March 12, 2023, sermon, this is the essence of what Reverend Lanning had to say: there are men in the church who disagree with what I preached who would be perfectly content with having a psalter hymnal in church.

On the basis of that statement, I had been given a narrative that those elders who would not shake Reverend Lanning’s hand really had a problem with singing only psalms in church, and they wanted to at least leave the door open for introducing all sorts of man-made hymns in corporate worship. Instantly, the alarm bells were raised in my mind. My Reformed antennae were sounding off, and I was deeply concerned at what the implications of that could mean for the churches. I thought to myself, “How could anyone in the Reformed Protestant Churches prefer to sing hymns rather than sing the psalms, even only the psalms, in corporate worship? Ought not we to love the psalms? Does not church history show us that false doctrine can be sung into the church by means of hymns?”

However, the narrative that I had been given was false. It was a lying narrative. Considering that lying narrative, I call Reverend Lanning and whoever else has spoken it to repent. Repent! For “lying lips are abomination to the LORD” (Prov. 12:22). Instead, let them heed the admonition, “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of

1 Nathan J. Langerak, “The Indwelling Word,” sermon preached on March 19, 2023, in Second Reformed Protestant Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>.

2 See Dewey Engelsma, “An Uncertain Sound,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 1 (April 15, 2023): 26–34.

3 See Andrew Lanning, “No Image Worship,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on March 5, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=35232335114953> and “The Regulative Principle of Worship,” sermon preached in First Reformed Protestant Church on March 12, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

another” (Eph. 4:25). Carrying that lying narrative, they trampled roughshod over the heads of all their brethren and easily left the denomination. Not a single sermon was protested; neither was there any regard for the welfare of the church and churches. For their false and lying narrative was sufficient for them.

Furthermore, Reverend Langerak exposed that false narrative for what it is in the sermon that I heard that Sunday evening. In the days and weeks following, the reality of the situation became increasingly clear. The issue never was hymnody versus psalmody in the church. Rather, the issue was whether the church could sing only the 150 canonical psalms and whether it was a sin and an accursed idolatry for the church to sing anything else. At this point, this is abundantly clear. This has been made clear by the public testimony of those who have left the Reformed Protestant Churches.

Moreover, I find it greatly offensive when Reverend Lanning, as the chief editor of his new “Reformed” magazine, recommends an article by Dewey Engelsma in which Mr. Engelsma attributes the position of the seminary students on exclusive psalmody to Reverend Langerak’s apparently other-worldly powers of persuasion. As has been asserted, we all have been given our “marching orders” and as submissive subjects are all too willing to follow our supreme leader to the end that he had previously determined.⁴ Reverend Langerak is supposedly the master puppeteer behind the present controversy, and the seminary students are as his toys that are being pulled every which way without any real resistance. However, this could not be any further from the truth. To assert this is to commit the sin of presumption and worse is to lie against the work of the Holy Spirit of promise, whose work it is to lead God’s people into all the truth (John 16:13).

There was in the seminary classroom a unanimous position that the doctrine of exclusive psalmody based on the second commandment teaches the error of legalism. There was no professor who was grooming his students to believe a certain way about the issue. Everyone had something to contribute to the discussion. Therefore, I

In the days and weeks following, the reality of the situation became increasingly clear. The issue never was hymnody versus psalmody in the church. Rather, the issue was whether the church could sing only the 150 canonical psalms and whether it was a sin and an accursed idolatry for the church to sing anything else.

think that I can speak for all of us students that those moments we spent discussing the issues after class were tremendously impactful for us, not merely in our understanding of the truth over against the lie but also in our appreciation for the simplicity of the gospel. Those were joyous times for us even amid the tremendous grief that this controversy had brought upon our churches. As a result of those discussions, we became inspired to study the issue even more on our own, and we always came together again with something new to contribute. I can only speak for myself when I say that I found myself coming back to Colossians 3:16 again and again. What may be the best proof text (not exegesis) for the proponents of exclusive psalmody became one of the most

comforting and reassuring passages for me over against that same position.

It seems that each minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches had his own explanation of Colossians 3:16. When I was preparing this article, I listened to sermons from several Protestant Reformed ministers on that same passage, and none of them seemed to be agreed. I listened to a sermon by Rev. Ronald Hanko, which taught that the passage was referring only to corporate worship and that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” were very clearly a reference to three different categories of the

150 psalms that the church can and must only sing in worship. Then I listened to a sermon by Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, in which he denied that the text was merely a reference to corporate worship. Instead, he taught that the exhortation applies to the entire life of the believer as he exists within the covenant sphere and is called to admonish one another and sing to one another. And then I listened to a sermon by Prof. Barry Gritters, in which he said that the text meant that the church sings the psalms “almost exclusively.”

The more I listened to these sermons, the more convinced I became that this controversy in our churches became an issue in part because it had never been settled in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Every man said that which was right in his own eyes, but all men failed to see

⁴ The full quotation is the following: “Having given his seminary students their marching orders, they are only too eager to carry out Reverend Langerak’s work for him.” Dewey Engelsma, “How Did This Happen? (1): Introduction,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 4 (May 6, 2023): 10.

what stood at the heart of the Colossians 3 passage, which is the word of Christ. That word is powerful. The word is effectual and works mightily in the hearts of God's elect people, so that they will and do of God's good pleasure. All things in the church and in the home are rooted in that word of Christ, so that it is only through the word of Christ that there is life, and outside of that word there is no life.

The word of Christ is the doctrine of Christ, which has at its core Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen. That word of Christ comes to us by way of the preaching of the gospel. That word of Christ, being properly expounded from the sacred scripture, also comes to us in the preaching of the gospel as a two-edged sword, a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:16).

Most broadly, then, we can understand the calling to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" to mean that when the word comes to you, believe it. Cleave unto it. Receive that word in faith and glory in it. Know that word and seek to understand that word. Do not speak against that word. Do not fight that word. Rather, "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." This is outside the realm of possibility for man. For man by nature hates the word of Christ and rebels against it. There is an aspect in which the exhortation completely rules out man and his activities. The calling then is a calling to faith in the word. As such it is a spiritual activity that man can never perform. It is only when that word enters the heart of the elect child of God by the Spirit of Jesus Christ that the word works effectually in that heart, moving, as it were, along the heartstrings and invariably producing melodious praises unto the Lord that arise from within that heart. There is an activity of the believer, but that activity is entirely the work of God and not at all the work of man. Therefore, the church sings because the word of Christ dwells in her richly. When the church cleaves to the word and receives it by faith, then she also sings that word in thankfulness unto God.

The word. The word. The word. Here is the key to understanding that text. The word is the difference between having a man-centered theology and a Christ-centered theology in that passage. Exclusive psalmody teaches a man-centered theology from Colossians 3:16. And what is that man-centered theology?

By their singing the psalms together with grace in their hearts to the Lord, the whole word of Christ dwelt in them richly in all wisdom, for the psalms are the little Bible.⁵

That theology is man-centered and conditional. It makes the indwelling word of Christ impotent until the church does something. It is not freedom; it is bondage. Essentially, it is no whit different than the doctrine of the churches from which we came out. And if the proponents of exclusive psalmody would have had their way in the Reformed Protestant Churches, we would have been led down that same road of apostasy. It is a theology that not only lies against the truth of the word of God but also lies against the Reformed tradition. One may need only to examine Martin Luther's own treatment of Colossians 3:16 to figure this out. After all, was it not Luther who first called the psalms a "little Bible"? Here is what Luther had to say about what it means to "sing with grace":

But what is the significance of Paul's phrase "with grace"? I offer the explanation that he refers to the grace of God and means that the singing of spiritual songs is to be voluntary, uncompelled, spontaneous, rendered with cheerfulness and prompted by love; not extorted by authority and law, as is the singing in our churches today. No one sings, preaches or prays from a recognition of mercy and grace received. The motive is a hope for gain, or a fear of punishment, injury and shame; or again, the holiest individuals bind themselves to obedience, or are driven to it, for the sake of winning heaven, and not at all to further the knowledge of the Word of God—the understanding of it richly and in all wisdom, as Paul desires it to be understood. I imagine Paul has in mind the charm of music and the beauty of poetry incident to song. He says in Ephesians 4, 29: "Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear." Likewise should songs be calculated to bring grace and favour to them who hear. Foul, unchaste and superfluous words have no place therein, nor have any inappropriate elements, elements void of significance and without virtue and life. Hymns are to be rich in meaning, to be pleasing and sweet, and thus productive of enjoyment for all hearers. The singing of such songs is very properly called in Hebrew singing "with grace," as Paul has it. Of this character of songs are the psalms and hymns of the Scriptures; they are good thoughts presented in pleasing words. Some songs, though expressed in charming words, are

5 Andrew Lanning, "The Wonderful Book of Psalms," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, issue 1 (April 15, 2023): 7.

worldly and carnal; while others presenting good thoughts are at the same time expressed in words inappropriate, unattractive and devoid of grace.⁶

What does Luther have to say about Colossians 3:16? Luther taught that the church's singing is a spontaneous activity that is rendered with cheerfulness and prompted by love and is therefore not extorted by law. For law is a cruel slave-master, which demands that the one who is under it keep that law perfectly, lest he die. But the church is not under the law. The church is under grace. And the church is under grace even with respect to her singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. When the church gathers for worship, she does not come with a law that she must follow in order for God to hear and receive her praises. Rather, the church comes with all cheerfulness and love.

The worship of the church is a spontaneous activity that is worked in her by the Spirit of Jesus Christ and arises out of faith—faith that is the opposite of working. The church's singing, therefore, as an expression of praise, of delighting in God, and a glorying in him alone as her God is itself a blessing from God. The church is not motivated to sing, even to sing the psalms, because in doing so she sings with Jesus, is heard of God, or enjoys fellowship with God. Rather, the church sings “from a recognition of mercy and grace received.”

In addition to this, Luther also emphasized that for the church to sing with grace means that the church sings with understanding of the word of Christ. The calling to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” is not merely outward or superficial, but it involves a profoundly inward and spiritual knowledge of that word. The church that admonishes one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs would that all the members of the church be kept in remembrance of the word of Christ, that the truth of Christ dwells richly in their hearts, and that every man confesses the truth of the word of Christ one with another. Therefore, the content of those things that the church sings is of critical importance. Let the church sing the word of Christ,

“By their singing the psalms together with grace in their hearts to the Lord, the whole word of Christ dwelt in them richly in all wisdom, for the psalms are the little Bible.” That theology is man-centered and conditional. It makes the indwelling word of Christ impotent until the church does something. It is not freedom; it is bondage.

that is, let the church sing the doctrine of Christ. And let the church not sing mere words as they appear on a page or in a book; rather, let the church sing with understanding. Just as the church knows and receives the word of Christ by faith in the preaching of the gospel, so also the church sings out of that knowledge and as an instrument to further that knowledge.

Apart from singing with understanding, it matters very little what form that worship takes, whether the church sings only psalms or she sings mostly psalms and a few doctrinally sound hymns. The danger is thus expressed. No church that worships under bondage to the law cares very much about singing with understanding. For then that church becomes more like Rome, which sang songs in Latin that no one could follow along with, let alone understand. The same is true for the proponents of exclusive psalmody.

If Luther were alive today, I suspect that he would level the same charge against those who teach exclusive psalmody. For them the emphasis is not on the understanding of the psalms and what they teach. Rather, the emphasis is on what the church sings—that she sings the right thing. I can sing with understanding the “Song of Moses,” the “Song of Zacharias,” the “Lord’s Prayer,” or any other song that can be derived from the word of God and be condemned by the proponents of exclusive psalmody because I did not sing the right thing. While Luther does mention the psalms in his exposition, he does not mention them in connection with the regulative principle of worship. Rather, Luther proves the beauty of the psalms in their content, that they are “good thoughts presented in pleasing words,” over against those songs that may have a charming expression but contain words that are not in harmony with sound doctrine.

The fact that exclusive psalmody makes the form of the church's singing more important than that she sings with understanding exposes the nature of exclusive psalmody—it is carnal. It is carnal to the very core. It is no less carnal than the endless laws that the Pharisees

⁶ Martin Luther, “The Glorious Adornment of Christians,” sermon translated by John Nicholas Lenker and edited by Richard Bucher; <https://sermons.martinluther.us/sermons30.html>, paragraph 30.

invented and by which they sought to establish their own righteousness. And the effect of this doctrine of exclusive psalmody will be the same as the effect of those laws of the scribes and Pharisees in that the blessedness of those who cleave to exclusive psalmody will also be carnal. Blessedness for the church will be because the church does certain things and does not do other things. Blessedness for the church will become wrapped up in the outward form until the church becomes a hollow shell of dead orthodoxy. On the outside they might appear very pleasing in the sight of men. However, on the inside they shall be like rotteness, festering sores, and even as whitewashed sepulchers.

I was blindsided. I was easily deceived. Like a wandering sheep, I was led astray. However—praise be to

God—I was delivered. For I heard the voice of Christ, my faithful shepherd, speak unto me and lead me into green pastures. I was as a bird that thinly escaped out of a hole in the net, which God himself cut out for me in Jesus Christ. The Lord has caused his face to shine upon the Reformed Protestant Churches in preserving his truth among us, who by nature are easily carried away by every wind of false doctrine. Is not this your comfort? We ought to stand amazed before the wondrous works of God. These are our landmarks. God testifies unto us every day of his never-ending faithfulness unto us. Let the churches be settled on this issue, and may the Lord ever preserve us in the truth of the simplicity of the gospel.

—Garrett Varner

CONTRIBUTION

MEDITATION: NO HELP IN PRINCES

*Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man,
in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth;
in that very day his thoughts perish.
Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help,
whose hope is in the LORD his God.*
—Psalm 146:3–5

Psalm 146 is a psalm of praise. The psalm begins and ends with the refrain, “Praise ye the LORD.” It is praise of the Lord God of Israel, who alone is the help and hope of his elect people, the God who is forever the God of Zion and who reigns unto all generations. Contrasted with God is the prince, man at his best. And the question of the text is this: In whom do you put your trust?

Answering this question negatively, the text says, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man.”

However, before we can speak of princes, we must speak of God, for he is central in the text. We cannot understand the princes without first understanding who God is and why he alone is to be trusted. And too, it is necessary for us to understand what this text is dealing with. We would be mistaken if we never made it past a

merely earthly interpretation of this text. Oh, yes, this is true, there is no confidence in princes even in that which is earthly, but the text is far deeper than this, for it deals not primarily in earthly matters but in the matter of salvation.

Verse 5 states that he is happy who has God as his help and who has the Lord God for his hope. It is then necessary to understand who this God is who makes one happy. First of all, he is the God of an elect people. It must never be presumed that this happiness is for those who are not God’s elect, that this is a happiness that any man can have. That this is the case is evident from the titles given unto God. He is called “the God of Jacob” and “the LORD” and “thy God, O Zion.” These names indicate that he is the God of a specific people.

That God is “the God of Jacob” refers to the fact that

he is the God of Israel, his chosen people. Is it not from Jacob that the twelve tribes of Israel came? Of course, I do not mean to say here that all those of the nation of Israel were God's people, for scripture testifies, "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). Rather, I speak of Israel as the elect kernel, God's elect as represented by the nation of Israel.

The name "LORD" indicates that God is Jehovah, the eternal I AM, who is ever faithful to his elect people, who is the unchangeable God. Being unchangeable in his being, his love is unchangeable, so that he has only and ever loved a certain people, who are his elect.

When Psalm 146:10 refers to God as "thy God, O Zion," it also references Zion, where God dwells with his people and where they worship him. He is shown to be a covenant God, one who dwells in love with his people in friendship and fellowship.

But still more! God, who is the friend of his elect people, is omnipotent. His omnipotence is shown to us beginning with verse 6 through the remainder of the psalm. It is here then that I say that you may not remain focused only on what is earthly, but you must see the spiritual reality behind all of these things. We see that God is the creator and sustainer of all things. All things are in his hands, and he directs all things according to his purpose. God is the keeper of truth. It is God who keeps his truth, so that it never fails, so that he ever preserves his church in the love of the truth and ever preserves the truth in her midst. It is God who executes judgment for the oppressed, who in life are ever oppressed by the wicked world, the apostate church, the devil and his hosts, and their

own sinful natures that plague them. But God will execute judgment, he will smite all those who afflict his church, and he will judge his church to be righteous. For does not God love the righteous, and will he not turn upside down the way of the wicked (v. 9)? He gives food to the hungry, loosens the prisoners, opens the eyes of the blind, and raises those bowed down. Oh, yes, God does all these things in an earthly way, but does he not do all these things in a spiritual manner? He feeds our hungry and thirsty souls with his word; he loosens us from sin and corruption and from the bondage of sin by the work of Christ on the cross; he gives us eyes to see, so that we see him as the one, true God and so that we know and understand him as our God; and he raises

us who are bowed down by sin and misery, who are so afflicted by the battle of sin that we cannot rise. But God is our strength, and he will deliver us and will raise us up who are bowed over. God also preserves the stranger and relieves the fatherless and widow. Are these not also vivid descriptions of God's people? We live in this world as pilgrims and strangers, for this world is not our home, but our home is in heaven. And are we not as the fatherless and the widow? We are as those who are without a father and who go companionless in this world, but God is our father and our companion. God provides for us as a father; and as our friend and companion, he never leaves nor forsakes us.

We see too in all these things the one who is happy, who has God for his help and whose hope is in God. This person is nothing. Do not verse 6 and the following

verses point out that this person who has God as his help is one who is in need of help? This person is one who is starved, oppressed, blind, a stranger in the world, a prisoner, and abandoned. These infirmities all point out the hopeless spiritual condition of this person. This person is a sinner, one who is destitute in himself, ineffectual to save himself, hopelessly lost, and oppressed by sin. But God is his help! God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, on God's behalf to take away all the sins of the

oppressed sinner, so that he might be judged righteous in Christ before the judgment seat of God. And too, this person is one who hopes in God. He is a stranger who hopes for heaven, and that hope is in the Lord. His hope is in the unchangeable God, and his hope is rooted in Christ Jesus and his cross, which secured forever his salvation. All of his expectation is in God alone.

Because the elect have this God as their help and have their hope in the changeless God who gave unto them salvation merely of grace, they are happy. This happiness is a spiritual happiness that cannot be defined in earthly terms, by the vain joy of this world, which is fleeting and is no true joy. This happiness really is an inner peace or comfort, so that amid the endless conflict in this life, we do not despair but always look to God and await the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

This happiness is the same comfort that the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of in Lord's Day 1. When speaking of our only comfort in life and in death, answer 1 says,

It is God who keeps his truth, so that it never fails, so that he ever preserves his church in the love of the truth and ever preserves the truth in her midst...He will smite all those who afflict his church, and he will judge his church to be righteous.

That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 83–84)

We also read of this happiness in 2 Corinthians 4: 8–9: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” This happiness is spoken of in this text in connection with the gospel of Jesus Christ, the same gospel spoken of in Psalm 146, which is that we have God as our help and that we hope in the Lord. That is the gospel, for to have God as our help means that we have Jesus Christ and all his saving benefits; and having Christ, we hope only in him, for in him alone is our salvation. Having Christ then, we are happy, so that though we be troubled, we will not be distressed; though we be perplexed, we will not despair; though we be persecuted, we will not be forsaken; though we be cast down, we will never be destroyed.

What then shall we say of princes? Are they sufficient to be the ground of such happiness? Absolutely not! We read, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.” When the text speaks of princes, it does not mean men generally. Rather, the text speaks of man at his very best. Princes are those who are mighty in the world, who have a say in things, who are wise, to whom people look, in whom people have confidence. And yet princes are of no help, and thus they provide no happiness. They are of no help because they cannot do that which God does, as described in verses 6 and following. God alone is the doer of these things, and man has no part in them, which is to say that there is nothing that man can do for his salvation.

The reason that man cannot do these things for his salvation is because he is subservient to God in all things, for God is the creator of heaven and earth and all therein (v. 6). Man even at his best is a mere creature and is beholden to God for his existence. This is verse 4: “His breath

goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” Man is mere dust. As soon as a man’s breath leaves his body, he dies and returns to the dust from which God created him. And in that very moment, man loses all his might, influence, and earthly things. In a word, man is mortal. And what trust can be placed on those who are destined to perish and return to the dust? This is the point of the end of verse 4: “In that very day his thoughts perish.” “Thoughts” here mean everything about a man, so that all a man does, aspires for, wishes for—all of his relationships and all of who he is—can be concluded under the thoughts of a man, for everything about a man is contained in his thoughts. And so, not only is man mortal, but also when man dies, everything about him ceases to be. His work perishes. His aspirations come to an end. His plans fail. His goals will never come to fruition. Man simply comes to an end. Thus princes

are not to be trusted, for when they perish (and they shall certainly perish), then all who rely on them are left with nothing. And when the prince-truster dies, shall his prince, who is confined to earthly breath, be of any benefit to him?

How much more glorious is God! He never perishes and is omnipotent. Therefore, all that he wills shall come to pass. He is the eternal and unchangeable God, which man can never be.

For this reason we are again renewed to joy, for we know that what God wills shall come to pass. Thus we have no need to fear, for we know that our salvation rests in God’s hands alone. Because salvation depends on him alone, we are saved and shall endure until Christ comes again because God never perishes but shall reign forever (v. 10). And when we die, we know that we have a heavenly Father who remains with us even in death and takes us up to heaven to dwell with him forever.

What then of us in the Reformed Protestant Churches? How many times have we not seen that princes are not to be trusted? Oh, yes, God gave us men who were princes. When we were in the Protestant Reformed Churches, God gave us princes who were wise, whose books we read, whose sermons we listened to, from whom we learned, about whom we would say that they could never teach false doctrine. But they did. And were we not surprised by that?

There is no help in princes.

Or did not God give us men and women who saw the error of the Protestant Reformed Churches, who

Princes are those who are mighty in the world, who have a say in things, who are wise, to whom people look, in whom people have confidence. And yet princes are of no help, and thus they provide no happiness.

protested, who instructed us, and then after all this departed for legalism? Were we not surprised when we saw who departed?

There is no help in princes.

Or when controversy over the school arose and it was made apparent that there were those among us who despised the creeds, were we not shocked by who despised the creeds?

There is no help in princes.

And again now, we see this. Are we not perplexed and bewildered? It is hardly believable that those who saw the lie of our mother so clearly and who led us out of an apostate church should now go panting after legalism and put us back into bondage by their stupid, man-made law. Did we not esteem them most highly? Did they not teach us the truth? Did they not write much concerning the truth? Were they not the chief of the princes, about whom we would say, "Surely they would not teach a false doctrine to us"? How then can they who loved the truth so dearly depart from the truth and return to the vomit again? Princes are but dust.

There is no help in princes.

Let us then put no trust in princes, in whom there is no help; but let us trust in God, who alone "keepeth truth for ever" (v. 6). Men do not preserve the truth in the church. The preservation of the truth is the work of God alone, for men are but dust; they have no strength.

What then shall we say about all of these princes whom God gave to us? They are mere instruments in the hands of God, the keeper of truth, who says, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life" (Isa. 43:4). God has used all of these men for the sake of the church. God used them to deliver us out of the apostate church, where we would have perished under false doctrine. They are but dust-instruments in God's hand, which instruments shall perish, but God shall ever

remain as the Lord of his church and the keeper of truth.

And, too, we have had nothing but controversy since the beginning. Shall we then say that we have no happiness and no peace? No, for our happiness and peace are not earthly or in a mere lack of controversy. Rather, we have joy and peace knowing that God is our help and that we have a sure hope in Jesus Christ. We possess happiness because we have Jesus Christ and that by the preaching of the pure gospel. Jesus Christ alone is the source of our happiness. We see that even though the church may be constantly fighting, she has peace because she has Jesus Christ.

There is then a word here for those who say that there is no peace in the church because she is always fighting for the truth and who depart from the true church for earthly peace. That word is, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God." The church that has God by Jesus Christ in the preaching of the gospel is happy. God by Jesus Christ is the source of her happiness, not that she does not have controversy. For Christ even says, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). The church will always be at war, but she is ever at peace and hopes in her Lord, who is her help. If you depart from the true church for earthly peace, you will find it; you will have an easy life, but you will not have peace, for you depart from God in whom alone is peace. Rather, you will be left with an earthly prince and an earthly peace that perishes.

Do we not then have a great occasion to be joyful? God is our God. He is our help. He is our sure hope. He shall keep his truth forever. He shall execute judgment for the oppressed. In him alone is happiness and peace. We then exclaim with the psalmist, "Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being" (Ps. 146:1-2).

—Earl David Kamps



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners,
who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. — Romans 16:7*

The apostle Paul was wont to address greetings to various beloved members of the churches to which he wrote. They shared a common faith, a common Spirit, a common love, and a common hatred of the ungodly world and apostate church world of their day. Here he calls the church of Rome to salute Andronicus and Junia, a man and a woman, perhaps husband and wife. They were his kinsmen, whether closely related by blood—brothers and sisters—or more distantly as fellow Jews, we are not told.

Were they among the five hundred brethren who saw the risen Lord that the apostle mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:6? “After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.” Then they were early Christians who were “in Christ” not only before Paul but almost from the beginning. Christ was seen of Paul too: “And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (vv. 8–9). While Paul was gripped by his unrighteous zeal for the law and opposed Christ and persecuted Christ’s church, these two saints were “in Christ” and bearing witness to his name and suffering for that name. They did not despise the apostle on account of his late coming to the Lord and even that he had persecuted the church, but they were fellow prisoners, which means they were also fellow laborers.

Perhaps this explains why the apostle Paul calls them apostles too, and not merely apostles but those who were eminent among all those who were called apostles. He does not mean that they were numbered among the thirteen apostles that Christ had chosen; but when Paul calls them apostles, he means those who were specifically charged with bearing witness to the truth of Christ. Barnabas was called an apostle as were Timothy and Silas. Not because they held that office but because they too were helps to the apostles and witnesses to the truth of Christ in the world. And you say, “Was a woman an apostle?” More than likely they were husband and wife, and she labored with him as all women do who are married to men who preach the gospel and serve the churches and without whom these men cannot labor.

But whether they were early in Christ or whether, like Paul, they were late in Christ as one born out of due time, Andronicus and Junia were *in Christ*. To be in Christ is salvation. To be in Christ is to possess him and all his riches and gifts. To be in Christ is to have his Spirit and to know him and to love him. To be in Christ is to be justified from all your sins and to have the righteousness of Christ and to be an heir of eternal life. That is the greatest thing that you can say about another person: “He or she is in Christ.”

And no man is in Christ of himself. No man by virtue of his superior intellect, understanding, and knowledge is in Christ before another, but all in their time, God’s time. Whether one is in Christ early, as were Andronicus and Junia, or whether one is in Christ like Paul, who was as one born out of due time, all are in Christ for the same reason: God’s eternal, unchanging, and unmerited grace.

And being in Christ by grace, they along with the apostle Paul labored abundantly for the gospel and were privileged to suffer reproach for Christ’s sake, even unto bonds. Such salute.

—NJL