



# SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Fourth Annual Meeting Edition

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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*The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him;  
and he will shew them his covenant.*  
— Psalm 25:14

Secrets are shared between friends and lovers. The very word *secret* refers to a loveseat where two lovers sit reclined together in each other's embrace. Reclining on that loveseat, it is part of their relationship that they speak and commune with one another in sweet fellowship. It is part of their relationship that they know things about each other that no others know.

Jehovah has a secret.

The divine secret of Jehovah is his covenant. We know that because David says, "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." It is as if I would say to you that the sun is on fire, and the red orb blazes. The sun is the red orb. When David speaks about the covenant, he is explaining to us what Jehovah's secret is. The secret of Jehovah is his covenant. The Hebrew word for *covenant* comes from the root that means *to clasp or embrace*. And therein is revealed the nature of a covenant. A covenant is a relationship between two lovers. In that relationship there is a depth and an intimacy that oftentimes is beyond the power of words to express.

Jehovah has a secret.

The secret is, first, Jehovah's own covenant life as the triune God. God dwells forever unmoved and unchanged as the eternal God, in light that no man can approach unto, and as the God whom no man has seen nor can see. He lives. Ever God is active. What is the life and activity of God but the covenant communion between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? That is the glorious secret of God. What does John say? "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). We would not know that unless God told us what his life is like. Fathers and sons have an objective relationship, but it is possible that there is between them no love or fellowship. Not so in God. There in John 1 by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, John gives to us a glimpse into the glorious secret of Jehovah's own covenant life.

Ever was this secret with  
Jehovah. It is as eternal as God is.  
Never was he without his secret,  
so that ever his people were  
with him in his counsel in Jesus  
Christ. Ever Jehovah's secret is  
perfect in God from eternity to  
eternity.

That is the life of God; that is his secret. Never does God become toward his people what he is not first and eternally in himself. And the secret of Jehovah is that he is the covenant God. He is the covenant God because he is the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons subsisting in the one being of God. One, only, true God, yet an utterly unique and mysterious oneness—the oneness of three persons who are all God, yet not three Gods but one, and in the one being there is perfect harmony, fellowship, and love.

Who can know it?

Who can discover this secret?

The Father eternally begets a Son in love, and the Son eternally presses himself in love toward his Father. Sweet communion. Ineffable fellowship. The holy family. God with God in God. Father breathing the Spirit of love to his Son. The Son returning the Spirit of love to his Father. The secret really is Jehovah himself, as he is the covenant God. When he causes his secret to be with us, he himself is with us. When he shows us his covenant, then he shows us himself. And when we come to

know his secret, then we also come to know what the covenant is. The covenant is an intimate relationship of fellowship and friendship between lovers.

And wonder of wonders, there is another part to Jehovah's secret. It is a secret because it was hidden in God. In the eternal and infinite life of God, always this secret was with him. He willed this. He decreed this. He sovereignly determined this. The secret was what God would do to reveal himself as the only good and ever-blessed covenant God in his own being. That we might know him; that we might taste that the Lord is good; that we might be taken up into his family and experience his fellowship and friendship; that God might be our God; and that we might be his people, he determined to reveal himself as the covenant God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is Jehovah's secret—Jesus Christ as the mystery of godliness. Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh—God who remains God—and he presses himself

ever tighter into the bosom of the Father, assumes to himself human flesh, and unites that flesh to the Godhead in order that in that man dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, in order that in Jesus Christ God would unite all things to himself.

Who can know it? Who can discover that wonder of wonders that God became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory—the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth?

And still more marvelous in the secret of Jehovah is that God beheld a people in Jesus Christ, that God loved them, and that God determined in Jesus Christ to establish with them his covenant and to take them as his own and that along the way of sin and grace and death and resurrection.

Oh, the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

That God chose a people from among the mass of humanity to be his people and that in distinction from those whom he reprobated. God's chosen people were a people of his love, whom he ever beheld in Christ as the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. So God ever beheld his people as redeemed, as covered in the blood of Christ, as justified before God, and as perfectly righteous in his sight. He never beheld iniquity in Jacob! Eternally, for the sake of the Lamb slain, there was no condemnation to God's people! Always they were his covenant people, precious and dear to him. Toward them his thoughts are thoughts of love. For them God purposed that they would dwell with him forever in the perfection of his covenant in the new heavens and new earth, walking before him in righteousness and holiness in the blood of the Lamb, that they might be forever in that new Jerusalem with God in the midst of her, to enjoy God as their covenant God and to give glory to him, the covenant God.

Oh, who could conceive such a secret? Who could know it?

Ever was this secret with Jehovah. It is as eternal as God is. Never was he without his secret, so that ever his people were with him in his counsel in Jesus Christ. Ever Jehovah's secret is perfect in God from eternity to eternity. Never was there a question of the fulfillment of his secret or the possibility of its failure; Jehovah ever has his secret before him as perfectly fulfilled. Ever was his secret the object of his delight, the purpose of his mind, and the desire of his heart.

And you understand, then, that we do not become God's people in time merely, but we were his people from all eternity. We do not become righteous in time apart from the eternal reality of that in God's counsel. From eternity to eternity, in his eternal counsel, God had us with him as perfect in Christ. We were with God,

were in his bosom, and were his delight. We were the apple of his eye and the delight of his heart. His people! To be called the people of Jehovah is salvation; it is blessedness; it is eternal life. It is that which the gospel promises: "You shall be my people, and I will be your God." That is the very essence of the promise of the gospel. That is what God purposed from all eternity. That is what is perfect in God from all eternity, what was hidden in God. His secret.

A secret that is with those who fear God: he will shew them his covenant. It was not God's will that this secret remain hidden in him, but it was God's will that it be revealed, that he carry out what he had purposed, and that he show what he had decreed. For us this means that God takes us up into his covenant in our own minds, consciences, experiences, and lives. He takes us to himself in the most intimate way. If I can explain to you what it is to know God in Christ, to have the secret of God, and to know his covenant, I can appeal to your experiences. The secret of Jehovah is a husband curled up with his wife and a wife with her husband; it is two lovers, sitting close together on a loveseat and talking about their hopes, their fears, their troubles, and their passions; it is a little boy, sitting on his mother's lap, leaning into her as she rubs his head; it is two friends who talk together: perhaps one of them is in trouble, and he opens himself up to the other one about his trouble. All that is delightful, pleasant, and good in human relationships are but a dim picture of our relationship with Jehovah.

The secret of Jehovah is with those who fear him—his most intimate friendship and fellowship. He takes us into his very life and tells us of Christ and of God's purpose for all things—his secret and deep things. He takes us into his bosom, under his wing, and into the shadow of his almighty power. He becomes to us a shield and a reward. That is the secret of Jehovah with those who fear him. And everything that we experience is what he has decreed to give to us and is his eternal secret shown to us!

To be taken into God's intimate fellowship is the work of Jehovah. It is absolutely of him. He causes his people to know it. The covenant is his. The covenant is who Jehovah is. The covenant is given to man. It is given to man as man's glory. It was Adam's glory to be created in covenant fellowship with God. It was Adam's excellence, and that fellowship lifted Adam up and set him in a lofty place. But being in honor and having that which there can be no better—life with God—and despising that life, Adam departed from God, who was Adam's life. God's covenant Adam broke. And God maintained that covenant. Not only did God maintain his covenant, but he revealed his covenant in a higher and more glorious sense

as a covenant of grace in Christ. And that covenant, the covenant of Jehovah's secret, his secret in Christ, Jehovah causes his people to know.

Jehovah causes his people to know his covenant because by nature, of themselves, they are utterly ignorant of it. That is who man is by nature; that is who all men are by nature; they are strangers from the covenant of promise. They are lost in darkness and are far from God, which is their death and their misery. That is us too by nature. No one discovers Jehovah's covenant; no one can search out Jehovah's secret; no one comes to the knowledge of it; no one enters into it by his strength or remains in it by his power or experiences it by his activities.

Absolutely unconditionally, Jehovah shows his people his covenant, and he causes his secret—his own precious, intimate fellowship—to be with them.

And so, this showing of Jehovah's covenant to his people is pure grace; from beginning to end it is pure grace. It is the result of Jehovah's love for his people because he desires them, because he desires that they be blessed in him by knowing him. Understand that: if you know God, you are blessed with eternal life. There is no higher and no more glorious thing that you can say of human beings than that they know God, that they are his covenant people, and that he reveals to them his secret.

God himself, according to his own determinate purpose, according to his election of grace, must cause his people to know Jehovah's secret. That is his very purpose that they come to know, that they come to understand, and that they come to experience him as the covenant God, to know his fellowship and to know the joy and pleasure that they are ever before him. He causes them to know.

Jehovah causes his people to know his covenant by causing them to know Christ. Christ is the covenant that God gave to his people. To know Christ is to know God as your covenant God, as your friend, and as your sovereign. Christ is Jehovah's secret, so that to know Christ is to enter into fellowship with the living God and to understand the things hidden in God. In Jesus Christ God draws near to his people. Christ took their very flesh and their very blood; in Jesus Christ God was touched with the feelings of their infirmities; in Jesus Christ God draws near to them and draws them near to himself in the tightest embrace. God reveals himself to them and speaks of his secret to them—his one, great, grand, and glorious

plan to redeem all things and to lift them up to heavenly glory in Christ, to whom all things are subservient. And thus Jehovah speaks to his people of their salvation and of their blessedness and tells them that all things that happen to them do not happen by chance but come by his fatherly hand, as those things are decreed by God as the necessary way to their glory.

The secret of Jehovah is that he makes his people one flesh with Christ. God joins them unto Christ, and they become bone of Christ's bone and flesh of his flesh; they are married to the risen Lord; they partake of his goodness, his grace, and his mercy; they eat him, and they drink him; and they understand what that means. It means not only that God's people get some benefits as those benefits come from Christ, but it also means that God's people receive those benefits as Christ comes unto them and fills them with himself, teaches them divine

things, and guides and directs them, as he forgives their sins, imputes to them his righteousness, and imparts unto them his life, his blessedness, his grace, and his glory. The secret of Jehovah is Christ, and to know Christ is to know that secret; to be ignorant of Christ is to be damningly ignorant of that secret. To be one with Christ, to be of his flesh and of his bones, is to sit on Jehovah's loveseat, to

be embraced within his fellowship, and to have God as your God and to be his people.

Jehovah's secret is with those who fear him. Of course, the secret is with God, or they would never fear him. Of course, the secret is with them, or they would only ever be blind to his working and would never see his covenant. Jehovah loved them. He included them in his secret according to his eternal purpose. He brought them into his secret. And as a fruit, they fear him.

Beautiful fruit, that they fear Jehovah. Surely not the terror of the ungodly. Surely not the slavish fear of the cowed servant. But the fear of Jehovah is an inner trembling of the heart that is the fruit of faith. That fear is really the manifestation of love. And I say that to fear Jehovah means to stand before God, in the tribunal of God, and in the judgment of God, as a sinner without sin—as a *sinner* without sin—because you are justified apart from your obedience to the law. That is the heart of it.

You enter into Jehovah's fellowship; you enter into the intimacy, the secrecy, of that fellowship; you come into his embrace; you sit on his loveseat, being justified by faith without obedience to the law.

It was not God's will that this secret remain hidden in him, but it was God's will that it be revealed, that he carry out what he had purposed, and that he show what he had decreed.

Such a one by faith, first, has trembled before Jehovah God and his requirement for perfection. Such a one has been undone by the holiness, the righteousness, the sovereignty, and the power of Jehovah God. Such a one has been impressed by the awesome grandeur and glorious excellence of God. God as God has impressed himself upon that man's heart.

Second, that man fears Jehovah God as a sinner whose sin has been exposed before God. There is no hiding who he is before God. God knows who that sinner is; God knows all of the sinner's thoughts, all his intentions, and all his purposes. God knows the innermost heart of that man.

Third, that man fears Jehovah as the one whom Jehovah has justified, to whom Jehovah has said, "For Christ's sake I forgive you all your trespasses; all your trespasses are covered because Christ took the curse upon himself."

Fourth, as the one whom Jehovah has justified, that man trembles in love for Jehovah as the merciful and gracious God.

See if that is not what Psalm 25 says. In thee do I trust; let none that wait on thee be ashamed; lead me in thy truth; for thou art the God of my salvation; remember

thy tender mercies and thy ancient loving-kindnesses; remember not my sins!

A confident pleading on Jehovah's mercy. That is faith, the faith of the one who fears Jehovah God. Jehovah's secret is with that one, to show unto him Jehovah's covenant. Jehovah draws that one into his fellowship and blesses that one with his grace and hears that one's pleading.

In their afflictions. It is this to which I want to draw to your attention. I asked myself, why in this psalm is there this wonderful revelation of the intimacy of the covenant? It is because of afflictions, troubles, pains, and sorrows caused by the enemies of our souls. These afflictions are many; they are fierce, cruel, strong, and deceitful as the devil. And it is particularly in those circumstances that our sins rise up to testify against us that we have no right to come to God, to be heard of God, to be saved by God, or to be blessed by God. And it is exactly in those circumstances that Jehovah God draws near to those who fear him to show them his covenant, in order that the secret of Jehovah—his intimate fellowship and the assurance of that fellowship—be theirs, not for their own sakes but for Christ's sake.

—NJL



Another special issue of *Sword and Shield* has arrived! This one is the fourth annual meeting edition. Every year near the end of October, Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) holds its annual association meeting. These meetings are where the new board members are elected to replace those retiring members; we hear fitting remarks from the board president; we hear a status report from the board secretary; and we are appraised by the board treasurer of the association's financial state. You will find all of these remarks and reports in this special issue. We also have a word on behalf of the board of Reformed Believers Publishing from the new board president, Joel Langerak.

Since its inception in 2020, Reformed Believers Publishing has been guided by the able leadership of Henry Kamps. This year he retired from the board along with Jon Langerak, another founding member of RBP. The newly elected board members are Andy Birkett, Doug Mingerink, and Ed Ophoff III.

The annual meeting is always a time of reflection. Many changes have happened at the board, in the association, and with *Sword and Shield*. Many, who at first joined their names to this righteous cause, later—through fear of men, their own cowardice, their willingness to sacrifice the truth for an unholy unity, or their being ensnared by false doctrine—abandoned Jesus Christ's work. After the first issue of *Sword and Shield* was published and distributed, there were many orchestrated acts of intimidation and threatening that continued in attempts to make the board cease publishing the magazine or, at the very least, to blunt its sharpness. Through all that upheaval the board remained steadfast. And that brings to mind the question, will the new RBP board have the same zeal for the truth and the same steadfastness in the face of fierce opposition that the old board showed? And as we hear from the new board president in his article titled "Born in Fire: Believers' Battle," we are encouraged to see that the commitment of RBP to publishing the truth and to fighting the good fight of faith through *Sword and Shield* is as strong as ever! We as the writing staff are thankful for such zeal and look forward to working together with the new board.

This issue is a good time to remind you that if you are edified by the content of *Sword and Shield* and you have the time, drop us a note, either to the editor or to the office of RBP. If you are edified by the content of *Sword and Shield* and want to see the content continued to be published, consider a donation. *Sword and Shield* is printed and distributed to its readers free of charge, and this cost is paid through the generosity of our readers.

At the annual association meeting, the highlight is a speech by a speaker invited by the board. This year we were treated to a speech on the topic "The Covenant Controversy of 1953" by Rev. Luke Bomers. You will find his speech published in this issue. As you will see from the content of the speech, we are not interested in the event of 1953 as a merely historical event. Rather, we view the event as a demonstration that the specific form of the doctrinal error of the conditional covenant with which *Sword and Shield* has done battle is the same error in essence as that faced by our spiritual fathers in 1953. The Protestant Reformed Churches and her theologians will not answer the charge that they teach the same false doctrine as did Rev. Hubert De Wolf and sometimes in the same words. They will not answer because they cannot answer without condemning themselves. We also maintain that the doctrinal truth of the unconditional covenant that is defended on the pages of *Sword and Shield* is the same doctrine as was defended by our spiritual fathers in 1953. Certain features have been sharpened and refined, as is always true of the truth when there is doctrinal controversy. But no honest person can deny that in essence the unconditional covenant defended in 1953 is the unconditional covenant defended on the pages of *Sword and Shield*.

You will also notice in this issue that there are two contributions from our readers for the *Insights* rubric. Keep the contributions coming!

Regarding the whole special issue, we pray that the Lord will refresh you by its content and with it arm you for the battle.

—NJL

## BORN IN FIRE: BELIEVERS' BATTLE

*Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey; and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. — Isaiah 59:14–18*

**T**his special 2023 issue of *Sword and Shield* marks the three-and-a-half-year commemoration of a glorious reformation for the church of Jesus Christ. Two thousand twenty was the year those who sat in darkness were shown a great light. God peeled off the scales from the eyes of the blind and unstopped the ears of the deaf. In the year 2020 God equipped believers with knowledge to judge all spiritual things and fortified them with steadfast courage to repudiate the lie. In the year 2020 believers were unshackled from their dread of ecclesiastical assault and martyrdom. God freed believers to boldly witness to the truth. God instructed his beloved that his word is truth and is above all, regardless of the aftermath, about which Jesus had said, “Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake” (Luke 21:16–17).

Two thousand twenty was the year that Jehovah God forged, in the fires of fierce opposition and doctrinal controversy, new implements in the battle of salvation. Through divine and sovereign blows on the anvils of his word and the Reformed creeds, God hammered out these weapons of war for his sovereign purpose. Two thousand twenty was the year that God reclaimed the believer’s office from authoritarian and insidious men. Divinely qualified for their office, God placed believers in the heat of the battle and equipped them with weapons of warfare. Forged with his own hands, God armed believers with *Sword and Shield*. “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa. 59:19). The Lord shook his people from their spiritual lethargy and quickened them with his *Spirit* and *truth*. In the year 2020 God taught their hands to war and their fingers to fight. God stirred up concern

in thirty-two men and made their cause his own. In the year 2020 Jehovah God made *Sword and Shield* his righteous cause.

As in the hands of a skillful warrior, these weapons advance as one in the proclamation of the truth and in the cutting down of the lie. Striking, clashing, countering, and defeating; in its short existence *Sword and Shield* has become an infamous, battle-hardened magazine. Its purpose is war. Its *sword* is dripping in blood, and its *shield* is dented and battered. This magazine must war for its righteous cause. *Sword and Shield* must war because it stands on the truth and for the truth. The magazine must war because this truth is the word that proceeds from the mouth of the thrice holy God, in whom there is no darkness. The magazine must war to sound the alarm. *Sword and Shield* must war because souls are at stake. The magazine must war for the glory and honor of God, its maker. The opposition is fierce; *Sword and Shield* has many foes because the magazine goes to war with each issue. Its foes detest the magazine because of its righteous cause. Foes revile *Sword and Shield* for its uncompromising zeal for the truth. Adversaries hate the magazine because it condemns them. It condemns them for every lie that they attempt to advance and for every truth that they deny. They hate it for its divine doctrine. They hate it for its light that exposes their darkness.

*Sword and Shield* has attacked the lie, and *Sword and Shield* will and must continue to attack every lie that stands opposed to the truth. The battle rages on today, and the battle will rage on tomorrow and through the coming year. This *sword* must be unsheathed. It must remain stained and bloody. This *shield* must endure every assault against the truth. *Sword and Shield* is not fighting “against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against



powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). *Sword and Shield* must wage war against the devil and all his deceitful devices. The magazine must war against those dark workers of iniquity. The magazine must war against the false church—against mother and her lie that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do,” against her heresy of assurance through works, against her justification through faith and repentance, and against her man-first dogma. *Sword and Shield* must war against any teaching that strips God of his glory and any lie that displaces the perfect work of Christ.

*Sword and Shield* will be opposed by many enemies. They will surge on all sides as a flood. *Sword and Shield* will be opposed by false teachers, seducers, and deceivers. *Sword and Shield* also will be opposed by parents, brothers, kinfolks, and friends. And *Sword and Shield* will be opposed by your own carnal flesh. We cannot shrink back from our magazine’s cause. We must not be ashamed of our magazine’s warring character. We must not soften our magazine’s blows or dull its razor-sharp edge. *Sword and Shield* must not propose a truce or seek wretched neutrality. Our magazine must not compromise the truth and deny Christ. We must not be seduced by ecumenical lust. *Sword and Shield* must never pursue an earthly and unholy peace. *Sword and Shield* must not backslide or relinquish any ground in the battle for the truth.

Our magazine must thunder the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation. God is God! Our

magazine must roar the glorious gospel of pure grace and the absolutely unconditional covenant to the utter abasement of man. God justifies the ungodly! Our magazine must shout forth the full and free pardon of sin. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life! God’s truth will go forth conquering and to conquer. Stand fast in this truth. Stand fast in this truth, ye blind, weak, and lame. Stand fast in the perfect and complete work of Jesus Christ. “Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13)! Stand fast, editors, writers, board members, and believers. The Lord Jehovah is our strength and song; he is our salvation. With his righteousness as our vanguard and the glory of the Lord as our rearward, stand fast! Our strength is in his might! Stand fast in Jehovah’s righteous cause! Commit your way to him.

May the Lord preserve our zeal for the truth and grant us the grace to never withdraw God’s *sword* or throw down his *shield*.

As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever. (Isa. 59:21)

—Joel Langerak, president  
on behalf of the board  
of Reformed Believers Publishing



# CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

On behalf of the board of Reformed Believers Publishing, I want to give a hearty welcome to everyone who came out tonight, especially those who came from far away. That you have joined us this evening is a great encouragement to the board and to the editors.

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the schism and reformation of 1953 in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

So the question for us tonight is, Why is Reformed Believers Publishing commemorating the covenant controversy of 1953, and what significance does 1953 hold for us now at this juncture in church history? We are not interested in 1953 as a merely historical event with its different persons and personalities involved. No, not that.

But this: nearly four years ago *Sword and Shield* began to wage a fierce battle against a form of conditional covenant theology that had again raised its ugly head in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

That witness and testimony was rejected by the PRC, and we were slandered as schismatics, antinomians, and rabble-rousers. The denomination cast out faithful officebearers, who had rebuked her for her errors and departure. Because of the PRC's hardness and persistent departure from the truth, we seceded from the PRC and formed a new denomination of churches where the truth of the pure gospel of sovereign grace could again be *preached*.

What now is the *divine* judgment of our controversy with the PRC in behalf of God's covenant? What *is* God's own appointment of the matter?

Was our separation from the Protestant Reformed Churches necessary?

Was the suspension and deposition of officebearers with all the pain and sorrow required?

Was our movement reformation and a return to the old paths, or was our movement mere revolution, as many have charged?

Was separation and reformation needed for the well-being of the church of Christ?

Will that reformation be for the spiritual prosperity of our generations?

Would it have been better to make some concessions, to bend a little, and to be nicer and more tolerant?

Would it have been better to shave off or to negotiate



Henry Kamps

away the truth of the gospel for the sake of peace and external unity?

In light of these important questions, our reexamination tonight of the covenant controversy, schism, and reformation of 1953 is for our instruction and serious reflection.

The covenant controversy of 1953 sheds much light on our doctrinal controversy with the PRC, that it was a matter of the preservation of the gospel. At stake in 1953 and then again in our controversy with the PRC was the doctrine of free, sovereign, unconditional grace itself.

The unconditionality or conditionality of the covenant *is* a matter of the gospel. The proclamation of the unconditional covenant of grace *is* the good news of salvation by grace alone. Nineteen fifty-three was doctrinal reformation and decisive victory for the truth that covenant salvation is determined by election, is absolutely unconditional, and is the only doctrine of the covenant that honors Jesus Christ.

Nineteen fifty-three shows that our reformation of 2021 was a return to this same confession of our fathers in 1953 and to the pure gospel of grace.

God now shows to all and sundry that *we* are not the schismatics and revolutionaries who departed from the truth of the unconditional covenant, but by God's grace we are the continuing representatives of the doctrinal and spiritual heritage that once belonged to the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Protestant Reformed denomination is no longer. God has taken away that doctrinal and spiritual heritage from her in judgment for despising her deliverance in 1953 and for not loving that heritage and its truth.

We humbly confess that we did not deserve to have the pure gospel of sovereign grace fully restored to us. We ourselves are guilty for letting the gospel of God's gracious, unconditional covenant slip away. We sat in the churches and tolerated Christ-less sermons for decades. God in his mercy has graciously given the pure gospel back to us.

This is worth celebrating! Praise the Lord!

Our remembering 1953 and its doctrinal heritage is at the same time a witness and a sharp warning to Protestant Reformed members still lingering in the denomination.

First, we take note that the Protestant Reformed denomination does not commemorate 1953. The professors, ministers, and members do not honor 1953 or celebrate it as reformation and victory for the truth. They are dead silent on it. They despise the two stalwarts, Herman Hoeksema and George Ophoff, who stood and fought to preserve the truth of God's covenant and were willing to split the churches for the cause of God's honor and truth.

Second, *Sword and Shield* has irrefutably demonstrated that all the current theologians and ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches *are* the spiritual offspring of the PRC's own heretic, Rev. Hubert De Wolf. Everywhere now in the PRC, the pulpits spew forth his false doctrine of salvation by man's efforts, which is Arminianism.

Our fathers warned us: "Arminianism is born out of hell and leads to hell." This is our warning to the PRC today.

### *Scripture Reading*

I have chosen to read three verses from Luke 6, spoken by our Lord, as an encouragement to us in our battle for the truth in the face of the extreme opposition we continually receive from the false church and because of the defection from our ranks that we suffer for our bold defense of the truth and blunt condemnation of the lie.

22. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.
23. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for

in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

26. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:22–23, 26)

### *Prayer*

O Lord, we bless thy name and confess that thou art the sovereign and almighty who has created the heavens and the earth.

We thank thee for our salvation in Jesus Christ, thy Son. We thank thee that thou hast made Christ the head of thy eternal covenant and made him responsible to deliver us from sin, condemnation, and death that was due unto us. We thank thee for his perfect sacrifice of death on the cross which made satisfaction to thy justice for all our sins. And we thank thee for his perfect obedience all his life long to thy holy law, which obedience thou hast imputed to us as our own, so that we can stand before thee as perfectly righteous.

We confess this is all for free. It is apart from anything we are or anything we have done to deserve it. We praise thee for so great salvation.

We confess Christ's atonement, his obedience—Christ alone.

Lord, we thank thee that thou hast given *Sword and Shield* magazine to the office of believer. We thank thee for the privilege that is ours to maintain a clear witness to the gospel of thy sovereign and particular grace of salvation.

Bless us tonight as we encourage one another in this task and as we commemorate thy great covenant faithfulness to preserve us in the same glorious truth of our fathers in 1953.

We thank thee that in the way of controversy and battle waged on the pages of our magazine thou hast led us in the way of reformation and recovery of the full truth of thy unconditional covenant.

We thank thee for our editors and writers. Continue to give them great boldness in the gospel, zeal for the truth, steadfastness in the face of opposition, and confidence that thy truth will triumph.

Give us courage to stand fast in these last days of great apostasy, to be faithful to thy truth unto the end, that no one take our crown.

We pray for thy blessing upon our speaker this evening and upon all of our other activities tonight. Hear us in mercy with the forgiveness of all our sins.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### *Introduction of the Speaker*

We now come to the main part of our program this evening. It is a great pleasure for me to introduce our speaker.

He is going to speak to us on the subject as announced: “The Covenant Controversy of 1953.”

We are especially excited about this subject, and it is of deep interest to us because we represent the continuing spiritual children of the reformation that God wrought in 1953.

The Protestant Reformed denomination despises the reformation of 1953, hates the doctrine of the unconditional covenant that was victorious in that controversy, and refuses to commemorate 1953 as reformation.

It is our privilege as Reformed Believers Publishing

to celebrate and champion this great controversy and this event as God’s gracious deliverance and restoration of the truth to the church of Christ. If we did not commemorate this glorious event, the stones would have to cry out.

Our speaker was ordained into the ministry of the word and sacraments in 2023 in the Reformed Protestant Churches. He is serving the pastorate of Zion Reformed Protestant Church in Yucaipa, California. He is also the rubric editor of *Our Doctrine in Sword and Shield*.

Join me in welcoming Rev. Luke Bomers.

## THE COVENANT CONTROVERSY OF 1953

### *Introduction*

Consider it a great privilege and a unique opportunity to speak to you on the covenant controversy of 1953.

I consider it a unique opportunity because the ecclesiastical climate of today is such that a speech on controversy is considered an absolute bore. There are many who are totally indifferent to the idea of doctrinal controversy. Yet this evening such a speech on doctrinal controversy is welcomed, and there are many who are excited about such a topic, and that is rare. That is a gift from God. There may be many who perhaps are nostalgic about controversy. They love to reflect about the controversy in the sixteenth century between the Protestants and Rome or the controversy in 1924 that led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches out of the Christian Reformed Church. But as soon as controversy touches their own lives, they want nothing to do with controversy. As soon as controversy limits their earthly way, they do not want to speak about controversy. They do not want controversy to affect their pleasant lives, so they push controversy as far away from themselves as possible and refuse to talk about it. And so, to have a gathering where there are those who are interested, yea, excited, about controversy and about the covenant is refreshing.

I also consider it a great privilege and a unique opportunity to speak on the covenant controversy of 1953 because who else would speak on such a topic? I can think of perhaps three denominations. Perhaps the Liberated, whose offspring is the federation called the



Rev. Luke Bomers

Canadian and American Reformed Churches, might be interested. Yea, it was the tide of the Liberated emigrants from the Netherlands that was the stimulus of the controversy in 1953. But I am not going to focus on the Liberated doctrine this evening. Really, by the time 1953 came about, dealings between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Liberated were essentially over. After the Declaration of Principles had been adopted—which

stood over against the Liberated doctrine that God gives an objective bequest of salvation, an objective bequest of the covenant, to the baptized child, which is realized when the child matures and accepts that promise by faith and repentance—Dr. Klaas Schilder in 1951 wrote an article in his *Reformatie* magazine titled “*De Kous Is Af*” (The Stocking is Finished).<sup>1</sup> From Schilder’s perspective a relationship with the Protestant Reformed Churches was over, and a year later he died. So perhaps the sons of the Liberated might have some interest in this topic but only incidentally.

The other denomination that might take an interest in the topic of the covenant controversy in 1953 is the Protestant Reformed Churches. But it has become abundantly evident in the deafening silence of the officebearers of the Protestant Reformed Churches and in the deafening silence of the *Standard Bearer* that these churches want nothing to do with that covenant controversy. *Sword and Shield* has contended time and again in many articles and in entire issues that the 2021 controversy of the Reformed Protestant Churches with the Protestant Reformed Churches was nothing but a continuation of the covenant controversy in 1953. And there is still an open request in *Sword and Shield* to the Protestant Reformed Churches to deal with that contention, to recognize it or to refute it. And there has not been a single response.

And that is not at all surprising. I say that that is not at all surprising based on my own experience as a seminary student in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. I go back now to March 2021, when I was in the second semester as first-year student. It was a time when classical agendas and synodical agendas had bloated to unprecedented sizes. By that time in March, Classis East had already concurred with the consistory of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church to depose Rev. Andrew Lanning. And by that time in March 2021, a new denomination had formed. And if you had been in that seminary, you would have asked yourself, “Doctrinal controversy? What doctrinal controversy?” If you could have been with the students auditing the classes, or if you could have been with the students as they sat with the professors in the breakroom, or if you could have sat with the students during the Friday chapels, you would have asked yourself, “What doctrinal controversy?” That topic was strictly off limits. There was no talking about it, not even in the seminary! And in light of everything that was

happening, I felt like a rubber duck tossed around on a tumultuous sea.

Finally, in March 2021, after the pleading of some students, it was agreed that a special student club meeting would be held “with the general topic being the current controversy in the PRC.”<sup>2</sup> The students were asked to submit “three to five of [their] most pressing questions about the subject.”<sup>3</sup> And that was an exciting time, for we could finally talk about the controversy that was being completely ignored. We could finally discuss what was going on in the denomination.

And it was also in March 2021 when *Sword and Shield* arrived in my mailbox. And an article in that issue of the magazine laid out very clearly that what was going on in the Protestant Reformed Churches in 2021 was nothing less than a continuation of the covenant controversy that had taken place in 1953. More specifically, the controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches was a continuation of and concerned conditional covenant theology applied to the daily experience of the believer. And the author of that article in *Sword and Shield* wrote that the Protestant Reformed Churches must reject “conditions for daily fellowship with God...by rejecting the emphases on man’s responsibility, man’s activity, and man’s obedience that so present the matter that God’s fellowship is effectively held in suspense until man acts.”<sup>4</sup>

So what was my most pressing question submitted to the student club committee? “Is that analysis correct? Is it true that what we are dealing with right now in 2021 is the same doctrine that the Protestant Reformed Churches were dealing with in 1953?” A simple question. But a question that the student club committee—a student club committee supervised by a *professor*—deemed inappropriate for group discussion, a discussion among professors and prospective ministers within the Protestant Reformed Churches! There was simply a refusal to talk about 1953. So I say that it is a great privilege and a unique opportunity to speak on this covenant controversy because such speaking will not happen in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

### *The Central Issue*

It is well known that the covenant controversy in 1953 had to deal with the unconditional covenant. I could say more specifically that the controversy of 1953 had to deal with the nature of God’s covenant promise. Now, having myself studied the primary sources of that time—in light

1 A summary of Schilder’s article, which was written in Dutch, can be found in Herman Hoeksema, “The Stocking Is Finished,” *Standard Bearer* 28, no. 7 (January 1, 1952): 148–53.

2 Faculty advisor’s email to the student club committee, dated March 16, 2021.

3 Faculty advisor’s email to the student club committee, dated March 16, 2021.

4 Nathan J. Langerak, “The Majority Report,” *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 13 (March 2021): 16.

of all the *Standard Bearer* articles that were written during that time; in light of the debate that took place on the floor of Synod 1951, when the final adoption of the Declaration of Principles was being discussed; in light of the majority report and the minority report of Classis East when it dealt with Rev. Hubert De Wolf's sermons<sup>5</sup>; and in light of the examination of Reverend De Wolf<sup>6</sup>—it has become apparent to me that the controversy of 1953 had to deal with the nature of God's covenant promise, particularly as that applied to the *preaching*. It was at the point of the *preaching* of God's covenant promise where all of this came to a head. How will God's covenant promise be preached?

That the *preaching* of the promise was, indeed, central to the controversy is evident in the Declaration of Principles. In the first head under D, it was the assertion of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1951

that the preaching of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 413)

The Declaration was interested in the *preaching* of the promises of the gospel.

I am not going to spend time this evening on the debate that took place on the floor of Synod 1951. That debate was recorded by a scribe and published in the *Standard Bearer*.<sup>7</sup> You can refer to those articles, or if you want a document of all those articles put together, my grandma Evelyn Langerak made such a document, and you can reach out to her. The men who were involved in that debate were very concerned about how they should preach God's promise. How will God's covenant promise be preached to God's people? How will it be preached to the church?

And that the 1953 controversy had to deal with the nature of God's promise in the preaching is evident in that Reverend De Wolf manifested his view of God's promise in his preaching itself. He proclaimed, "God promises every one of you that, if you believe, you shall be saved."

And it was in the preaching that Reverend De Wolf said, "Our act of conversion is a prerequisite to enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>8</sup>

It was in the *preaching* of the covenant promise of God that many manifested their false doctrine.

On one side of the controversy were those who wanted to maintain a conditional promise. And in 1953 it was ministers within the Protestant Reformed Churches who were enamored of Schilder's presentation of the promise who wanted to maintain a conditional promise. They did not care so much about Schilder's insistence that God gives a general promise to all the baptized children, which promise is realized finally when those children mature and accept that promise by faith and repentance. But those ministers had become enamored of Schilder's presentation of God's promise, particularly regarding the *preaching* of that promise. They were mesmerized—you might say *blinded*—by all the demands and all the responsibilities and all the duties that scripture presents to man, which to those ministers were necessary to be fulfilled before God's covenant would be ministered unto a person. And so they wanted conditions in the *preaching* of God's promises but only in a certain sense.

You have to understand, of course, what those ministers meant by *condition*. They always insisted that salvation was unconditional. Salvation was absolutely unconditional. They would say that over and over and over again. They just wanted to maintain the sense of a conditional promise *when that promise was preached*, when that promise confronted the child of God. What they meant by *condition* is writ large in the writings from that time. For those ministers a *condition* was "the confrontation of God's demand which God annexes to the promise."<sup>9</sup> A *condition* was merely a preceding demand that comes with God's promise. A *condition* was a prerequisite, something that is required, before God's promise is fulfilled.

Although it is like pulling teeth today to get men to admit what a *condition* is, that idea of a *condition* from the conditional-covenant men of 1953 is all you need to know. That is what they were teaching in 1953. Or to put it this way—which, again, has been written over and over and over on the pages of *Sword and Shield*—a *condition* is

5 For the majority report and the minority report, see Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 481–503.

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

7 Herman Hoeksema, "Our Synod of 1951," *Standard Bearer* 28, no. 3 (November 1, 1951): 124–32. The five-part series of editorials ended with "The Synod of 1951," *Standard Bearer* 28, no. 8 (January 15, 1952): 172–80.

8 For Reverend De Wolf's two quotations, see "De Wolf's Examination," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 17 (April 2022): 8–9.

9 Rev. L. Doezema's quotation, in Herman Hoeksema, "The Synod of 1951," *Standard Bearer* 28, no. 8, 174. In connection with Doezema's insistence that God's promise is conditional, he also said, "God has placed that unbreakable relationship [between God's demand and God's promise] that there is no enjoyment of salvation until certain things take place and certain demands are fulfilled," 177.

*A* that precedes *B*; and without *A* preceding *B*, *B* cannot come. You can have a whole list of what *A* can be. *A* is whatever you want to throw into *A*. *A* is man's activity; *A* is man's willing; *A* is man's repenting; *A* is man's believing. Make these *A*. And *B* is God's covenant blessedness, all the blessings of the covenant. And you can enumerate the blessings. Do you want a blessing to be forgiveness? Do you want a blessing to be comfort? Do you want a blessing to be assurance? Do you want a blessing to be knowledge that God is your God? Make these *B*. And now, *A* precedes *B*; and unless *A* precedes *B*, *B* cannot come. That is a *condition*. You can say that man's activity is caused by God's grace. You can say that man's activity is caused by the Holy Spirit. Regardless of how many qualifications you give to such a statement, you still have a *condition*.

And in 1953 a conditional promise was explicitly preached that way: "God promises every one of you, that if you believe, you shall be saved." That is not how a conditional promise is going to come today; at least I do not expect it to come that way. A conditional promise today is taught whenever you are left with the *impression* that your activity in some respect affects God's bestowal of the promise. If the preaching of God's covenant promise comes to you, and you are left with the impression, simply the impression, that your activity affects in any respect God's bestowal of the promise, you have been taught a conditional covenant promise. And you can take that positively, and you can take that negatively. If some good that you will or desire or do positively affects God's bestowal of God's promised blessings, you have been taught a conditional covenant promise. And you can take that negatively, so that if your sins or your evil desires affect God's bestowal of God's promised blessings, you have been taught a conditional covenant promise.

In 1953 there was a term that exposed the lie. That term exposed where there was division within the Protestant Reformed Churches. And that term was that God's

covenant promise is *absolutely unconditional*. And what this means is that when God comes to realize his covenant promise and bestows covenant blessings, this does not take into account any of man's activity, whether positive or negative. That is what *absolutely unconditional* means. And that term exposed the ministers in 1953 who wanted a conditional promise. They hated the truth of the absolutely unconditional promise; they did not want that truth. In their preaching they wanted to confront their congregations with God's demands, so that the congregations understood that without the fulfillment of those demands God's blessings could not come. That term *absolutely unconditional* exposed those ministers. They did not want it. When the Declaration of Principles was under discussion on the floor of Synod 1951, they were trying to weasel clauses into the Declaration that God's promise is conditional in a certain sense.<sup>10</sup>

The term *absolutely unconditional* today exposes the Protestant Reformed Churches too. That God's covenant promise is absolutely unconditional exposes them in their preaching; the term exposes them in their synodical decisions. And now I mention specifically the Protestant Reformed synodical decisions of 2018 and 2021. In

2018 synod taught, as everyone well knows, that the covenant fellowship of God is "through faith (instrument), on the basis of what Christ has done (ground), and in the way of our obedience (way of conduct or manner of living)."<sup>11</sup> Consider how God's covenant promise should be preached in light of that declaration: "God promises covenant fellowship in the way of your obedience." That preaching brings into view man's activity, such that without man's activity there is no covenant fellowship. That is what preaching in light of the 2018 synodical decision does. Why does one have covenant fellowship? Because he is walking in the way of obedience. Why does one not have covenant fellowship? Because he is not walking in the way of obedience. That kind of preaching denies that God's promise is absolutely unconditional.

God's covenant promise is *absolutely unconditional*. And what this means is that when God comes to realize his covenant promise and bestows covenant blessings, this does not take into account any of man's activity, whether positive or negative.

10 For example, see Rev. L. Doezema's proposed amendment to the Declaration of Principles—"There are conditions in God's Word, the confrontation of God's demand which God annexes to the promise, in order to bring out clearly His unconditional grace and mercy, as well as His just wrath and man's inability to fulfill them"—and the discussion regarding that amendment in Herman Hoeksema, "The Synod of 1951," *Standard Bearer* 28, no. 8, 174–177.

11 *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America* 2018, 74, 76.

Or what about Synod 2021 that asserted that there are activities of man that precede the blessings of God?<sup>12</sup> How is that preached? “God will give you some promised good, but man’s activity must come first.” Man’s activity then obscures God’s promised good. That preaching brings into view man, what man does, what man wills, and that denies the absolutely unconditional nature of God’s covenant promise.

### *What Absolutely Unconditional Means*

Over against any idea of a conditional covenant, what was taught by the orthodox fathers in 1953 and what is being taught in *Sword and Shield* today is that God’s covenant promise is absolutely unconditional.

Let me give you an analogy. Let us say that there is a rich man who decides to bestow a large sum of money on another person, some beneficiary. But if you say that the beneficiary receives all that money only in the way of his doing something, you would say that his activities are determinative for his receiving that good. Or let us say that this beneficiary is going to receive a large amount of money, and he must first do this or that before he receives the money; you would say that his activities determine whether or not he is going to receive that promised good. Over against these ideas, *absolutely unconditional* means that this beneficiary receives that rich sum of money absolutely freely, without any respect to what that man has done or will do. His works absolutely do not come into view.

That God’s covenant promise is absolutely unconditional is abundantly evident in the mother promise. When God came to trembling Adam and Eve, who had just transgressed God’s good commandment and had spit in God’s face and had desired Satan and not God, God declared to man’s enemy, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). That is the mother promise. Where were Adam’s activities when God came and declared that mother promise? Where was Adam’s doing—Adam’s doing whether good or Adam’s doing whether evil? Adam’s doing simply did not come into view when God gave his covenant promise. And just as every creature that has ever existed on earth can only beget creatures of the same kind, that promise could only beget children of the same nature. Throughout the Old Testament that mother labored in birth pangs. Every time God came to speak his promise, God rent the heavens and sovereignly declared, “I will establish my covenant” and “I will make a new covenant” and “I

will be their God.” That mother labored in pain until, in the fullness of time, Jesus Christ came—Jesus Christ, who came without the will of man and without any respect to what man had done. That is the nature of God’s promise.

The promise, then, does not rest in us. It does not rest in us, who by nature are totally corrupt, inclined to all evil and sin. The promise does not rest on anything you do or will, whether good or evil. Upon what does the promise rest? That one, Jesus Christ. The promise is absolutely unconditional and does not take into respect any of your works because the promise rests on Christ’s perfect work. And here you see that you can never get away from that glorious doctrine of justification. Justification is not as it was taught to me one time in the preaching. I was told that we walk past the gates of justification, and then we are in this new realm, the new realm of sanctification, this new realm of man’s activity. No! When one walks in God’s kingdom of blessing, he is *always* standing on the ground of Christ’s righteousness. That one never leaves it, whether he is walking on the golden pavement or whether he is walking alongside the river that issues forth from the throne of God. One is always standing on the work of another—the work of Jesus Christ. That is why the promise is absolutely unconditional.

But you may not stop there. Many are content with leaving Christ as the basis. That is all they want with Christ. But Christ continues to be Christ. Christ is not one who only lays the immutable and everlasting righteousness of that kingdom, but he is a risen and exalted Christ, who ever abides as the head of the covenant to bestow that covenant, to give every blessing of that covenant, to give God’s promised good to all the promised seed. Christ ever lives as head of the covenant. He is the Christ who is seated at the right hand of God as our prophet, as our priest, and as our king. And this means that he is *responsible*. He is responsible as the chief prophet and teacher to send the word of the promise into the world and to give what that promise speaks to his people. He is responsible as the priest who ever lives to make intercession on behalf of God’s people. He *lives* to make intercession. That is his very breath in heaven, constantly interceding with the Father on our behalf, just as God ordained. “Father,” he prays, “behold this one offering that has perfected forever those who are sanctified. Behold this offering and fill me with good.” And it is Christ who is full of that covenant blessedness and bestows it upon his church as our priest. He raises his hands ever in heaven to bless his church. And he is

<sup>12</sup> *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2021*, 119–24.



the risen and exalted king too. Understand that. He is responsible for that covenant promise as king, so that now he holds the very reins of this world and has been endued with all power and all authority to put all things into the service of God's covenant and to protect God's promised seed. He spends nations and kingdoms and peoples for God's promised seed. Does man's activity come into view here? *Absolutely unconditional* means that there is only one whose work matters, one who determines everything, and that is Christ.

But that is not the end of it. Why is the promise of God absolutely unconditional? Jesus Christ, having ascended into heaven to be seated at God's right hand, has received the promise of the Spirit, so that the Spirit is that Lord. It is that Spirit who in God's own covenant life is the rich gift of the covenant, the personal embrace of the Father to the Son and the embrace of the Son to Father, the gift of love. Every blessing of the covenant is the Spirit. And now with the rending of the heavens by the promise, the Spirit of Jesus Christ swoops down with all the fullness of Christ. Christ and every blessing of the covenant swoop down in the irresistible and sovereign breath of God to succor those who are in need.

And *absolutely unconditional* means that there is only one explanation for why one man receives God's promise and why another does not, only one explanation for why one man is blessed and another is cursed. Who receives that perfect work of Christ? For whom does Christ minister at the right hand of God? Who receives that gift of the Holy Spirit and every covenant blessing? The elect and the elect alone. Whenever a conditional covenant promise comes into the church, it is because man hates election, and man hates reprobation. And man will not let God decide according to God's own good pleasure who receives the promise and who does not. Why do some believe and others do not believe? Why are some assured of their justification and others are not assured? Why do some have peace and others do not have peace? Why do some have joy and others do not have joy? Because God said so. Because God decreed it. Because God chose a people in Jesus Christ from before the foundation of the world without any respect to what they would do. And because many others he did not choose but hated and appointed to destruction from before the foundation of the world without any respect to what they would do. The promise simply does not depend on men. God's sovereign decree

The promise is absolutely unconditional and does not take into respect any of your works because the promise rests on Christ's perfect work.

of election and reprobation determines God's bestowal of the promise.

And that is what must be known in the preaching. That is what God's people must taste in the preaching. Understand, you and I cannot be humbled enough when it comes to our view of ourselves and our pride. You are blessed, you are *only* blessed, because of God's decree and not in any respect to what you have done and who you are. You have not distinguished yourselves in any respect based on what you have done. You and I need to know that. You and I need to hear that week after week. So proud, so conceited, and so foolish we are. We need to know that too for our comfort. What you do does not affect God's bestowal of his promise. He will give to all of his elect the full blessedness of the covenant apart from anything they do.

Why do I have joy and another does not? Why do I have peace and another does not? Why do I have forgiveness and another does not? Why do you have preaching that comes to you so that the impression is left that you have distinguished yourself in some respect for these things—if your response has to do with “I”—you have been taught a conditional covenant promise. Unless the preaching of God's covenant promise leaves you wondering, “Well, why must I do good works?” then you have been taught a conditional covenant promise.

And God will not be glorified by a conditional covenant promise. God, who has determined the end from the beginning; God, who freely and sovereignly bestows his covenant and all of its blessedness—this God will not be worshiped or called upon or known as the God who bestows what he promises because he has first enabled man to do something that is necessary to receive the promise. That is no God. If that is your god—a god who has bestowed the promise because he has enabled man to do first what man needs to do before god bestows the promise—you have fashioned for yourself a stock, and you worship an idol. God will be glorified, and God will be known as the one who sovereignly, irresistibly, *absolutely unconditionally* bestows his covenant. That is what the orthodox fathers taught, and that is what they defended in the covenant controversy of 1953.

### *Effects of Defending the Truth*

And now before I close, I want to remind you of what the Protestant Reformed Churches endured in 1953 for her defense of that truth. The Protestant Reformed denomi-

nation suffered immense earthly loss. The denomination was reduced by two-thirds—two-thirds of her ministers, two-thirds of her members, and two-thirds of her churches. And it was not that mere loss that was painful. In doctrinal controversy there is terrible carnage. A war leaves no family untouched. Sons are slaughtered by the enemy and perish in the trenches. Some flee from their place on the front line and obtain the punishment for desertion. In battle none return home without some lasting trauma and stress. Such is the nature of warfare. And it is no different in doctrinal warfare, in maintaining the truth over against the lie. There will be carnage, and there will be earthly loss. There will be suffering. Such is the nature of warfare. In this life we are not promised earthly peace; we are promised a sword. To minimize and to shame the expected carnage in battle are to abysmally weaken the forces in their stance over against the lie.

The Reformed Protestant Churches were mocked in a letter from Professor Engelsma, who wrote,

Neither of your leaders cares a snap about the peace of the churches. Let the churches suffer. Let marriages and families be further divided “You can stick your principle [for which you fight] where the sun doesn’t shine.” I have a greater and more glorious principle...the unity of the church.<sup>13</sup>

That mentality is fatal. That mentality will lead swiftly to the destruction of a denomination, for there is no unity except in the truth. There is no peace except in the truth. If that is the mentality and if that is the unity you want, you share that same ambition with the antichrist, who needs that kind of mentality and that unity to establish his antichristian kingdom.

In this life we have not earthly peace but a sword. Such was the case in the covenant controversy in 1953. Not only that, but those who stood for the truth and the denomination that stood for the truth became the butt of jokes, the reproach of the Reformed church world. There were many loud voices that had much to say about persons and personalities and who had not a clue about the doctrine involved in the controversy. The same voices are heard today. Many in the Protestant Reformed Churches clamor for peace and say, “There is no difference between what *Sword and Shield* witnesses and what is held to in the Protestant Reformed denomination.” They say that because they have not made it any of their business to understand the doctrine. They

do not care about doctrine. They are not interested in doctrine. Doctrine does not mean anything to them because they do not care about the glory and beauty of the living and holy God.

And it is that doctrinal indifference that destroys a denomination. It is that doctrinal indifference that is written all over the report of the Protestant Reformed Classis East that just came out this past week. The officebearers at the classis refused to deal with the doctrine. Why? Because distinctive Reformed doctrine does not mean anything. They do not see the glory of God in it.

And that leads to rapid apostasy. That happened in 1953—astoundingly rapid apostasy. Those who wanted to maintain a conditional covenant promise and separated themselves from the Protestant Reformed Churches, within a few years, just a few years, were already having ecclesiastical contacts, not with the Liberated but with the Christian Reformed Church. And as those who left the Protestant Reformed Churches considered joining themselves with the Christian Reformed Church, they were confronted with the labor union and with the adultery of divorce and remarriage. It was coming out at that time that the Christian Reformed Church wanted theistic evolution, and certain circles denied the infallibility of scripture. But those who left the Protestant Reformed Churches still went to the Christian Reformed Church! Why? Because when people have been confronted face to face with the glory of God in the truth of Jesus Christ, when they have been confronted with the glory of God’s absolutely unconditional covenant promise and reject that, they crucify Christ anew, and they mock and spit at God. And God sends them on their way to swift destruction, mocking and laughing at their demise.

The truth has been brought. The truth has been witnessed to. And that truth has been rejected. Thus our continued warning to anyone who has an ear to hear in the Protestant Reformed Churches is, “All you can expect is massive, swift apostasy. Get out!”

But God maintains his truth. By God’s grace he has given witness to that truth through *Sword and Shield*. And that witness in *Sword and Shield* does not depend on men. That witness does not depend on the labors of men. God’s testimony to his truth and his witness of his truth absolutely do not rest and rely on the labors of men. That is our confidence because God gives an absolutely unconditional covenant promise.

Thank you for your time.

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<sup>13</sup> David J. Engelsma, letter to Anon, undated.

# ANNUAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

**J**ehovah has been good to Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP). This is evident when reflecting on the events of this past year. The events of the past year include the publishing of another volume of *Sword and Shield*, the appointment of a new editor in chief, and new rubrics in *Sword and Shield*, including *Running Footmen* and *Insights*. The Lord has been good to the association, the board, and the staff of *Sword and Shield* not because of our own faithfulness. The Lord has been good because he is gracious according to his own promise to preserve his people in the truth of his word. Our covenant God continues to work in and through the writers, staff, and board so that his truth, not the will of man, is proclaimed on the pages of *Sword and Shield*. We give thanks for our Lord's faithfulness to us in another year!

We marvel at God's goodness as *Sword and Shield* is in its fourth year of publication. There is still much excitement among the readership as each issue reaches several countries and many states. When the new issue arrives in the mail, readers eagerly take to their phones to spread the news. There are stories of excited readers who have even found ways to find a copy of the new issue before it is mailed to the rest of the readership. The magazine remains free of charge for any interested reader. Each issue of *Sword and Shield* costs around five thousand dollars to produce, so please consider donating to Reformed Believers Publishing. We thank God for the financial gifts that allow the magazine to be sent out without interruption!

As readers, *Sword and Shield* shows up in our mailboxes and in our web browsers with little to no effort by us. There is, however, much work being done behind the scenes to produce this magazine. Rev. Nathan Langerak, the editor in chief, spends time organizing rubrics, scheduling writers and articles, writing his regular articles, and much more. Each issue requires hours of labor from the other writers as they put their thoughts into text. The copy editors of *Sword and Shield*, Evelyn Langerak and Ally Ophoff, have been invaluable to the reading quality of the articles as they masterfully make corrections to the articles. The board labors monthly to manage and supervise the affairs of the RBP association. We thank the retiring board members, Henry Kamps and Jon Langerak, for their labors in these past few years. We also



Stefan Bodbyl

thank Wonderland Tire for allowing the free use of their corporate office for our monthly board meetings. Truly, there has been much labor from all of these men and women, and it is our confession that this is the work of Jesus Christ by his Spirit. We thank God for their labors and pray that he continues to preserve them in spirit and in truth.

We thank God for working zeal in and through believers, such that *Sword and Shield* remains a believer's magazine that is governed by the association's elected board. The paper is not a self-governed publication, such that one man may dominate the paper with his own views. We pray that God continues to work in us as believers the fruit of witnessing *together* to the Reformed truth. To that end we ask those who share the desire to witness to the Reformed truth to join us in this glorious work. If you are not a member, please consider joining Reformed Believers Publishing. *Sword and Shield* welcomes contributions, so consider submitting an article on a topic or doctrine of God that interests you, or perhaps consider submitting something interesting that you have read. There are many ways in which to support Reformed Believers Publishing, and we thank all those who have contributed their time, energy, finances, and prayers.

God has been faithful to the purpose of *Sword and Shield* as a polemical magazine that promotes the truth

of God's sovereignty in salvation and condemns all lies repugnant to God's truth. The pages of *Sword and Shield* remain a spiritual battleground. Relevant controversies in today's church world have been central to the attention of *Sword and Shield*. If someone were to pick up an issue with the hope of finding smooth words that seek

to create an artificial peace, then they would be sorely disappointed. The warfare is hot, and Christ continues to build up his church by cutting down the false teachers who seek to rob the rest of God's beloved people. May God continue to use *Sword and Shield* to edify his church and to strike down those who seek to do her harm!

## ANNUAL TREASURER'S REPORT

The fiscal year of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) is October 1 to September 31. The primary source of income to support the publishing and mailing of *Sword and Shield* comes from gifts. The other sources of income are from a few people who pay for subscriptions to the magazine and from the sales of bound volumes of *Sword and Shield*. The total income for the last fiscal year was \$64,118.41. Of that amount \$58,506.59 came from donations. The printing and typesetting costs for the last fiscal year amounted to \$69,442.98. Postage and administrative expenses totaled \$13,823.00, leaving RBP with a fiscal-year deficit of \$19,147.57. The current balance on hand is \$39,896.24.

Currently, RBP prints 2,200 copies of each issue of *Sword and Shield*. As was mentioned by the secretary, each issue costs about \$5,000, and the price can be higher for issues with larger page counts. Although the number of each issue that is mailed out fluctuates from month to month, depending on new subscribers and cancellations, currently 1,819 copies of each issue are mailed to people living in the United States, and 89 copies are mailed to those living outside the country.

Once again, we have reason to be thankful to our covenant God for providing financially for Reformed Believers Publishing. Since our last annual meeting, fourteen issues of *Sword and Shield* have been published and



Jason Cleveland

mailed out free of charge. All of the expenses for typesetting, printing, and mailing the magazine have been covered by generous donations from our supporters.

I take this opportunity to ask you to consider donating to this worthy cause. Donations can be made online at the website of Reformed Believers Publishing (<https://reformedbelieverspub.org/donations/donation-form/>), and donations can be mailed to the RBP office at 325 84th St SW, Suite 102, Byron Center, MI 49315.

As treasurer and on behalf of the board, I thank you for your financial support over the past year.

Thank you.

# FAILED RUNNERS: CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

*Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?*  
—Galatians 5:7

Sadly, Reformed Believers Publishing had two defectors this past year that must be mentioned. One is Neil Meyer, who faithlessly deserted his post on the board. The other is Rev. Andy Lanning, who resigned his post as editor in chief of *Sword and Shield*.

Our meeting tonight would not be complete without saying a few words regarding Reverend Lanning. He was one of our founding champions, and he was instrumental in our reclaiming of the pure gospel of particular, sovereign grace and the truth of the unconditional covenant. We are thankful for his past leadership and instruction in the truth. God used him wonderfully to help so many of us come to a renewed understanding of the pure gospel.

His departure is a grief to us. We marvel at the devil, that the devil sidetracked Reverend Lanning, so that Reverend Lanning defected from such an important post and is now become useless in the battle for the gospel

of sovereign grace and the unconditional covenant—the very cause for which *Sword and Shield* and Reformed Believers Publishing began. In this connection we do not reject his articles or instruction in the truth that he gave on the pages of *Sword and Shield* while he was editor in chief. His articles can be read with great spiritual profit, and we recognize that God used him mightily in behalf of the recovery of the gospel of sovereign grace in our midst.

Even though Reverend Lanning has left us, thankfully, by God's grace, *Sword and Shield* has not skipped a beat in its content. The Lord has blessed us with a new, very capable editor in chief and even with additional capable writers. It is still just as exciting to get another issue of *Sword and Shield* in our mailboxes each month. In fact, I want to say that every issue is better than the previous one. We are grateful that the Lord has helped us and given to us the ability to continue in this witness to his truth.



# COMMITTED TO PUBLISHING THE TRUTH

It is good to see so many supporters here. I remember well the first meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing, and a lot of changes have taken place since then. But to see the ongoing enthusiasm for the work of publishing the truth is encouraging to us as writers.

*Sword and Shield* was formed to publish the truth. *Sword and Shield* was formed as a believers' magazine. Our mandate to publish the truth does not come from the church. Our mandate comes from Jesus Christ himself, who gives to believers his Spirit and who says, "Confess me before men." Reformed Believers Publishing was formed because we stood to honor that command of Jesus Christ: "Confess me before men."

Jesus Christ was being denied in the Protestant Reformed Churches. He was being denied in sermons; he was being denied in synodical decisions; he was being denied in discussions; he was being denied left and right. And you could not hear the truth; you could not speak it; you could not write it; you could not contend for it. And because of that, Reformed Believers Publishing was started to publish the truth.

And it is that truth that is also our right to existence. Reformed Believers Publishing has the right to publish the truth, to be heard, to be read, because *Sword and Shield* publishes the truth. *Sword and Shield's* righteous cause is particularly the truth of God's unconditional covenant. That unconditional covenant, as we heard tonight, was the issue in 1953, and the unconditional covenant continues to be the issue today. And as the editor in chief, I want you to know that I view the place of *Sword and Shield* in the church world and the task of *Sword and Shield* in that place to engage in that controversy in defense of God's unconditional covenant. *Sword and Shield's* place is not to speak to current events, as if it were a newsy magazine. *Sword and Shield's* place is not to address broadly topics in theology, as though we have but an intellectual interest in the truth. *Sword and Shield's* task, *Sword and Shield's* purpose, is to defend the truth of the unconditional covenant of God. In doing that, then, *Sword and Shield* will speak to all of the truth because all of the truth is in the service of the unconditional covenant of God, wherein God is revealed and wherein God is glorified.

In light of that I want to thank the board for its



Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

constancy and support, especially during this rather tumultuous year. My friend and my colleague left his post. He abandoned this righteous cause that Jesus Christ started. It never was our cause; it was always Christ's. That is why, over against all of the opposition that has been flung at *Sword and Shield*, the magazine remained because the adversaries were hurling all of their opposition at Jesus Christ. And I am thankful that the board through that tumultuous event remained steadfast in the purpose to publish the truth, to keep *Sword and Shield* going, and to see to it that our witness continues.

I am thankful for the new writers that we have. I am thankful for the willingness of laymen and laywomen to write in *Sword and Shield*. I am thankful for the submissions that we have already received for the new rubric *Insights*. It becomes abundantly clear every day that *Sword and Shield* is the Lord's work. It is the Lord's work to witness to the truth of his unconditional covenant and to cause that witness to be heard, for good or for evil.

I also want to express thanks to the retiring board members. They have been unflinching and unwavering in their support of the endeavor to publish *Sword and Shield* and that at great loss to themselves, so that they show that the truth means more to them than their own lives.

I also want to give a word of encouragement to the new board members. That word of encouragement is to follow in the footsteps of those whom you succeed, to

stand steadfast in the truth, to brush off all criticism, to disregard all calls to blunt the very sharp edge of *Sword and Shield*, and to encourage us as writers too, that we remain sharp, that we refuse to blunt the very sharp edge of *Sword and Shield*. The board and the writing staff have an excellent mutual understanding and working relationship that is born of a mutual love for the truth and the desire to see the truth published. This must continue.

I see new faces here tonight. It is especially heartening to see many young people here tonight. And I want to say one other thing about this meeting. This meeting is a testament to the commitment of Reformed Believers Publishing to the office of believer. That is what you have to think of when you see these meetings: the office of believer. It is the most basic office in the church. It is that office out of which all other offices arise, so that without the office of believer, there cannot be ministers, elders, and deacons. And it is the right of that office of believer to form organizations such as this and to support organizations such as this, so that with their support and their encouragement they publish their confession of the truth. That is what this organization represents. It represents the confession or witness of believers. There is a witness of the church, and there is also a witness of believers. And here we celebrate the witness of believers.

That witness of believers is what was crushed in the Protestant Reformed Churches. That is what was

forbidden. There was an organization that once stood for the witness of believers, but it was taken over on the board side by men who were ignorant of the purpose of the organization, who lacked commitment to its historical position in the publishing world, and who had no zeal for the truth as it once had been proclaimed. That organization was then hijacked by unrighteous men, who had no interest in publishing the truth, who had a great interest in being accepted among men, and who achieved their ends by unrighteous censorship, fear tactics, intimidation, and the persecution of the truth. And Jesus Christ recovered the truth. He recovered the truth, and this organization is a testimony to that recovery.

I want you to understand the importance of that. It is my view that the truth cannot remain in the church apart from organizations such as Reformed Believers Publishing. This organization, and the magazine that it publishes, was the midwife to the Reformed Protestant Churches, so that Reformed Believers Publishing was there during the labor that finally gave birth to the Reformed Protestant Churches. Reformed Believers Publishing has a continuing place because she has a continuing mandate to publish the truth. With God's grace we shall carry on in that work. So I want to encourage all of you in the truth. Thank you for your support, and be encouraged in that support that we have a righteous cause, the cause of Jesus Christ and his truth.



# CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

In conclusion, I want to thank Wonderland Tire and its crew for getting the facility set up for us so nicely, and also thanks to Teresa and Linda Kamps for the special touches and the refreshments that they have set out for us. I also want to thank Dave Moore for coming up from Indiana and for his expertise in the operation of the sound equipment.

And I want to invite everyone, after we sing a psalter number and close with prayer, to stay for fellowship and refreshments.

After we sing Reverend Langerak will close for us in prayer.

We will sing all four stanzas of psalter number 407, "The Promise of Victory."

1. O praise ye the Lord  
And sing a new song,  
Amid all His saints  
His praises prolong;  
The praise of their Maker  
His people shall sing,  
And children of Zion  
Rejoice in their King.
2. With timbrel and harp  
And joyful acclaim,

With gladness and mirth,  
Sing praise to His Name;  
For God in His people  
His pleasure doth seek,  
With robes of salvation  
He clotheth the meek.

3. In glory exult,  
Ye saints of the Lord;  
With songs in the night  
High praises accord;  
Go forth in His service  
And strong in His might  
To conquer all evil  
And stand for the right.
4. For this is His word;  
His saints shall not fail,  
But over the earth  
Their power shall prevail;  
All kingdoms and nations  
Shall yield to their sway.  
To God give the glory  
And praise Him for aye.<sup>1</sup>



Dave Moore



<sup>1</sup> No. 407:1–4, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian *Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1927; rev. ed. 1995).



# EDITOR'S CLOSING PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, we give thanks unto thee for the night, a night in which we could rejoice in the freedom that we have in the truth. We were in bondage. And so terrible was the bondage, we hardly knew it until thou didst open our eyes and thou didst call us as Israel out of Egypt into a new promised land.

And we give thanks, Lord, for the material means thou dost give to us to support the truth. We give thanks for the organization and the magazine that is published by that organization, and we marvel at thy goodness. We marvel at thy ways. Thy ways, Lord, are not our ways. Thy ways are higher than our ways. And we see that by means of that magazine thou hast not left thyself without a witness. Lord, send forth that witness, that that witness may be heard and that that witness may drive

the apostasy of the false church, and with that witness, thou, being gracious, may draw out of that burning and destruction thine own dear people. Give them ears to hear, Lord, and eyes to see and hearts to understand and heal them. Heal them from that misery and that hopelessness that we ourselves experienced under the miserable doctrine out of which thou hast drawn us. Give them with us the liberty that we have in the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

We ask, Lord, that thou wilt bless our fellowship tonight. Wilt thou give us encouragement through this fellowship to be steadfast in our purpose. And, Lord, bless this righteous cause, not for our sakes but for Jesus' sake, in whose name we conclude our prayer.

Amen.



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

## COMPLETE OR INCOMPLETE SAVIOR?

Here are a couple of interesting quotes regarding the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's federal vision that I feel could be either ironic or at least thought provoking for the times in which we live. The quotations are interesting reads, especially now that people are leaving the Protestant Reformed Churches for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) left and right.

It is amazing to me that those who would join the OPC will follow the likes of Cornelius VanTil (a CRC man) and John Frame and Richard Gaffin, all the while stomping on the graves of men like J. Gresham Machen and Gordon Clark, who for all intents and purposes had a theology that much more ran in the line of Hoeksema's, although not completely.

What a trap those who join the OPC are walking into!  
—James Jansma

John Robbins asked, "Can the Orthodox Presbyterian Church be saved?"

The OPC's record for the past 30 years on this central doctrine of the Christian faith [justification by faith alone] is not good. It failed to condemn Norman Shepherd's teaching of justification by faith and works in the 1970s when it had opportunities to do so. In 2003, the General Assembly overturned John Kinnaird's conviction for teaching justification by faith and works, stating positively that his teaching was in accord with Scripture and the Westminster Confession. Some of the OPC's prominent Teaching Elders, including Cornelius VanTil, John Frame (now in the PCA), and Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., have vocally defended Shepherd and his doctrine of justification.

This was not always so. When J. Gresham Machen and others started the OPC, then called the Presbyterian Church of America, in 1936,

the stand of the Church for the Gospel was clear and consistent. But Machen was killed by overwork and pneumonia a few months later, and another institution he began, Westminster Seminary, a parachurch organization independent of and unsupervised by the OPC, first influenced and later controlled the denomination. The Seminary placed enough graduates in the OPC congregations to shield their errant professors from criticism and discipline.<sup>1</sup>

Stephen Cunah wrote regarding Richard Gaffin's view of justification by faith and works,

According to Dr. Gaffin's view, faith and works are constituent parts of a faith/works complex that is necessary to obtain justification. Just as access to the flight is partially dependent upon the presence of a passport, so justification is made to be partially dependent upon the presence of good works. This goes beyond the traditional Protestant view that works are only evidential or declarative with respect to justification. When Dr. Gaffin refers to works as "*the integral* fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith" in justification, he acknowledges works to be "the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith," but denies that works are *solely* evidential with respect to justification.

It is clear that Dr. Gaffin denies that works are the ground or basis of a believer's justification. What is not so clear is how works produced through faith can be pulled within the sphere of justification and, at the same time, not share any degree of instrumentality with faith, nor be a part of what faith itself is. Unless there is a new category or description that this writer is not aware of to characterize the relationship

<sup>1</sup> John W. Robbins, *Can the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Be Saved?* (Trinity Foundation, 2004), 8–9.

between works and justification, we are limited to the categories of ground, instrument, and evidence. If works produced through faith are in the smallest degree beyond purely evidential of justification, it follows that they must be, to some degree, either the ground or instrument of justification. There is absolutely no question that Dr. Gaffin denies works to be the ground or basis of a believer's justification. Therefore, although he explicitly says that works are not (co-) instrumental with faith in the appropriation of justification, it is implicit in his teaching that works have some degree of instrumentality in securing justification. If a passport is required to get on the plane to Germany, the passport can properly be said to be partially instrumental in obtaining access to the plane.

Even if it could be demonstrated that it is possible to hold that true faith only justifies when it is part of a faith/works complex and, at the same time, that these works do not share any degree of instrumentality with faith, the practical effect in the heart and mind of the person who grasps this teaching would be to treat works produced through faith as partially instrumental in securing justification. When works produced through faith are connected to justification in a way that is beyond purely evidential, the practical effect will be to direct a sinner to produce good works through faith in order to obtain the acceptance of the Supreme Governor and Judge of the Universe. In other words, despite any fine distinctions that might be made, this teaching would practically result in the seeking of justification through faith and works. Of course, it is inherently contradictory to say that true faith only justifies when it is part of a faith/works complex and, at the same time, that these works do not share any degree of instrumentality with faith in justification.<sup>2</sup>

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Here is a submission for the rubric *Insights*. Something edifying!

—Amanda Ophoff

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.—Acts 4:12

Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, a Savior? Because He saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins; and likewise, because we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other.—Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 29

Just as Jesus is the complete savior *for* us, redeeming us, and he is the complete savior *in us*, delivering us, so he is also the complete savior *through us*.

You know, the baptism form is so beautiful, beloved. In the first part of that doctrinal part of the baptism form, we have God's part. Remember? God makes an eternal covenant of grace with us. The Father makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for his children and heirs and provides us with every good thing and averts all evil or turns it to our profit. The Son redeems us, satisfies in his blood for all our sins, makes us righteous before God. And the Holy Spirit dwells in us, regenerating us, renewing us, and sanctifying us to the very end! That's all God's part of the salvation in the baptism form. All God's part.

And then comes our part. Yes, our part. Not our party. And, beloved, there are people who also do not understand this, and they say this: "I believe that Jesus is a complete savior for us. I believe that he is a complete savior within us; but now when it's finished, now comes our part." And then they say, "But we must do this: that we walk in a new and holy life and bear fruits of thankfulness. That's for us."

Well, beloved, those that say so are still Arminian. Still do not understand the truth. Because the truth is this: that Jesus also bears the fruit. And that we are privileged to be instrumental in showing forth the fruits of Jesus Christ in our lives—that's our privilege. That's the truth. Jesus for us. Jesus in us. And Jesus through us.

Christ is the vine, and the vine bears fruit. We are the branches, and we bear the fruits, beloved. Christ is the head, and we are the members of his body, and it is our privilege that we may bear the fruits of Christ, the head, in our good works. So that it is not so that God becomes beholden to us because we do good works, but we are beholden to God because we have the privilege of doing good works and walking in a new and holy life.

It's all of God and none of us. That's salvation, beloved. That's salvation. Christ for us, in us, and through us. All of Christ as the revelation of the God of our salvation.

Believe? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are saved, beloved.

Amen.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Stephen M. Cunah, *The Emperor Has No Clothes: Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.'s Doctrine of Justification* (The Trinity Foundation, 2008), 29–31.

<sup>3</sup> Herman Hoeksema, "Jesus, the Complete Savior," sermon on Lord's Day 11, preached September 25, 1955, [https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc\\_sermon=heidelberg-catechism-sermons](https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=heidelberg-catechism-sermons).



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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. — Isaiah 40:31*

**J**ehovah does all things in his own time, according to his own purpose and will. A glorious purpose: “Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (Ps. 130:7–8)! A promise of full and complete redemption in a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness shall dwell and when the tabernacle of God will be with men. Wait on Jehovah.

Was that not the lesson of all of Old Testament history? Cain killed righteous Abel because Abel’s deeds were righteous and Cain’s were wicked, and Abel’s blood cries from the ground. Wait on Jehovah. Sarah shall conceive and bare a son, but it appeared never to come. Wait on Jehovah. Israel, first sojourning in Egypt and then enslaved by the cruel Egyptians far from the promised land. Wait on Jehovah. Israel on the shore with the sea before them and the Egyptians behind them. Wait on Jehovah. David in his desperate flight from Saul, harried and hounded for years over the countryside of Israel. Wait on Jehovah. Hezekiah surrounded in Jerusalem by the murderous and blaspheming host of Asshur. Wait on Jehovah. And at the center of all of that history was the great promise of the coming of the seed of the woman, who was then surrounded by his enemies and crucified on the cross, while the powers of darkness rejoiced. This was their hour and the power of darkness. Wait on Jehovah.

And Christ arose the third day, and the kingdom of Satan trembled! Wait on Jehovah.

New Testament history is no different. Satan goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour because he knows that his time is short. Many times the word and cause of God appear to go down to defeat. Many times the wicked evildoers and enemies of God and his cause appear to triumph. This is all the more so because the night is far spent, and the day is at hand. So the scoffers say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Pet. 3:4). Wait on Jehovah. “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Ps. 37:9).

Jehovah may suffer many griefs upon the just to fall; but he will bring them safely through, delivering them from all. By evil are the evil slain, and they that hate the just; but all his servants God redeems, and safe in him they trust.

Wait on Jehovah and hope in his word: the secret of spiritual strength. To run ahead of Jehovah, to grow impatient with Jehovah, to help Jehovah along, and to grow discontented with the ways of Jehovah are spiritually draining and futile tasks. But those who wait on him shall renew their strength. Waiting on Jehovah and trusting in him, they cast off all their own strength, their own wisdom, and their own ways. And supplied and refreshed by strength from the inexhaustible and overflowing source of all goodness and blessing, they fly; they run; they walk in their pilgrim’s journey, fighting the good fight of faith and warring against sin, Satan, and his whole dominion and overcoming those enemies until they appear without spot or wrinkle in the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

“Wait, I say, on the LORD” (Ps. 27:14).

“O LORD...let none that wait on thee be ashamed: let them be ashamed which transgress without cause” (Ps. 25:1, 3).

—NJL