



SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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IF GOD BE FOR US!

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

—Romans 8:31

There is a glorious aria in Handel's *Messiah*, perhaps the finest of the whole glorious piece of music, in which the question of this text is asked and answered in a sonorous, alto melody; and, finally, an exclamation point is placed on the whole question and answer with the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ and the final Amen! If that is heavenly, imagine what the reality will be when the Lord appears again.

What shall we say to these things? Oh, that we would at all times stand at the height of faith on which the apostle here stands as he gives the glorious response of faith to these things: "If God be for us, who can be against us!" A triumphant shout this is really. Nothing can be against us!

But the Christian as he walks in this life, which is nothing but a continual death, and lives in this valley of tears is more like a little child who is afraid of the dark and terrified of phantoms and monsters conjured up by his fertile imagination. The things that the Christian faces are painful and troublesome and frequently extort from him a cry of anguish and deep sorrow. The believer lives his life in a universe that labors and travails under the power of God's anger, in which the evil is sufficient for every day, in a creation that moves relentlessly forward to its fiery end, and in which man is quickly cut off and flies away. And in his journey through this life, the believer can suppose that he is overwhelmed with life. One thing after another comes to him. And as he experiences these various things, he gives each a very large place in his life, in his mind, and in the universe itself. The believer is like the little child in a dark and shadowy room who sees everything out of proportion, so that what is familiar seems to have a different shape and becomes a cause for fear. But when the light is turned on, then the little child sees again, and everything is back in its proper place.

The apostle turns on the light of Jesus Christ and his salvation to faith and shows us the things that we must face in that light of Jesus Christ. And in the face of our fears, our experiences, and the things that threaten us—the things present and things to come—the apostle confronts us with the powerful and all-encompassing question: What shall we say to these things? To that

question the apostle gives the powerful and all-encompassing answer: "If God be for us, who can be against us!"

The viewpoint of the text is the viewpoint of the elect church of God in the world, and it is the viewpoint of the beloved brethren and sisters of their eldest brother, Jesus Christ. "These things" in the text are a reference to the believer's whole situation in the world. So the viewpoint of the text is of the child of God in a sin-cursed world that groans and travails under the bondage of corruption. The viewpoint of the text is first of the child of God in his suffering and especially in his suffering for the gospel's sake. There is no comforting word in the text for the false Christian who carefully calculates to save his life and to spare himself the suffering that invariably comes on those who confess Christ. If the false Christian saves his position, his name, his family and friends, there is no word for him, except that he who saves his life shall lose it in the world to come.

There is no word in the text for the wicked evildoer, that false Christian or lying officebearer who takes the side of evil in this life. How does such a one not love to quote Romans 8:31 in his distress and to read it at funerals. With the text the evildoer seeks to strengthen the hands of the wicked, so that they do not repent, and to assure them in their opposition to and hatred of the gospel that all will be well with them. But there is no word in the text for those who hate the gospel, slander it, and oppose it. The word for them is to repent or perish.

The viewpoint of the text is the children of God who live in this sin-cursed and groaning world and who suffer the loss of their lives for Christ's sake. They are the ones who possess a glory that will one day be revealed in the resurrection. Their glory and hope are hidden now in heaven, and on this earth they are strangers with no abiding place. Their home is in heaven. They are born of the Spirit, from above, according to God's own decree for their salvation. They have eternal life now and can never die. They are free from the curse of the law and walk in liberty, free from the bondage of the law and of sin, free from death and the curse. They are in Christ, and they walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh. They are children of their heavenly Father; they have not the spirit of bondage and fear but the Spirit of life in Christ, the Spirit

whereby they cry, “Abba Father!” They are heirs together with Christ, and because of Christ they are heirs of all things. They have hope in the unseen things of the world to come, of which their faith is the profound evidence. They are loved of God, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified, already enjoying the life of heaven and freedom in Christ. So when we speak of “these things,” we must say that they include the things of salvation, the certain knowledge and joy in that salvation.

Then from that standpoint of the elect, what shall we say to these things?

We live in a creation subjected to bondage and that groans and travails in bondage until the redemption of all things. And in such a creation, then, in the most general way, there are for us unspeakable sufferings and sorrows, miseries and heartaches, and disappointments and griefs, so that the elect know not what to pray for. And the Spirit himself prays for them with groanings that cannot be uttered.

What shall we say to these things?

There are the sufferings of this present time: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. And to these things are added other things: the powers of death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, and any other creatures.

Tribulation comes on us from the world and false church that oppress the church. Distress lays hold on us, so that we are forced into a very narrow place, so that if we would look at that place not being in it, we would say that the narrow place would squeeze us to death! Persecution is all the mockery, the evil looks, the disparaging remarks, the hatred, the ridicule, all of the distress, and the narrow places that are specifically suffered by us in this world for Christ’s sake because we hold the word and testimony of Jesus Christ and because we speak that word and testimony in a world that hates God and knows not the Lord Jesus Christ. Famine and nakedness come on us because, for the testimony of Christ, we are squeezed out of the world and suffer lack in it. There are perils not only to our lives but also to our souls! And have we suffered yet the sword, that terrible instrument of death wielded against the church when the world, not satisfied with our anguish and distress, screams also for our blood?

And the apostle moves from the narrow window of our experiences and takes us on a grand tour of the universe to its farthest reaches and shows to us its greatest powers. What shall we say to death? What shall we say to life? Oh, indeed, what will we say to life? Is it for us nothing but a continual death? What shall we say to angels and devils, principalities and powers, whether temporal and tangible or whether spiritual and otherworldly? What shall we say to things present or things to come, for we know not what the future holds, whether good or evil will come

on us? We can in the future expect for certain that the situation of the church in the world will not change. For all who live godly in the world shall suffer persecution. And the servant is not greater than his master; if they hated and reviled and put him to death, how much more will the world not do that to us? And what shall we say to heights or depths, to heaven or hell, to the great experiences of joy and triumph and the crushing experiences of setbacks and disappointments? And if there are any other creatures, then what shall we say to them?

What shall you say to these things? *To* them! We have to stare these things in the face, and they lay hold upon us as though they were themselves persons and the personifications of evil. These things take on lives of their own. They are with us and on our minds and consume our thoughts and energy. They are as real and as close as the person sitting next to us. And we must speak to them when they come into our lives.

And besides, notice that the apostle asks, “*Who* can be against us?” It is not merely *what* can be against us because in the midst of these circumstances, there is not only a *what*, but also a *who* to whom we must speak. Is it only Satan and his murderous principality that are against us in these things, as he was operative behind the calamities that rapidly befell Job and left him covered in dust, ashes, and painful boils? Does Satan not employ others in his wicked works? There may be miserable comforters like Job had, who used his calamities as an occasion to assail him. And there is always our sinful flesh that takes calamity, distress, and trouble to work against us, to tempt us, and to war against the Spirit. The question of what we shall say to these things, therefore, is not the academic’s question, and neither is it the question of the theologian in his ivory tower. The question must be answered when these things come to us through personal instruments of evil that have a name and a face. The devil? Oh, yes, he is ever present to cause us to despair. But also a spouse, a brother, a sister, a cousin, a friend, a colleague, an elder, a deacon, and a minister!

You sit with them in the same house; you see them at the grocery store, out to dinner, or on the jobsite. You must hear their sneering taunts and read their scathing emails, their mocking and depressing letters, and their heartless accusations. They too demand an answer about these things; and in demanding an answer, they inflict on us untold griefs. They accuse and bite and devour with their slanderous tongues. With their hands they grab us, and with their feet they stomp on us. With their eyes full of hatred, they glower at us, and with pitiless ears they hear our cries.

What shall we say to these things? What shall be your assessment of them? What shall you say about them? Oh, yes, a judgment and an evaluation and an explanation are always demanded. But what do you say *to* them? What do you hold up as that great good that makes these things

strictly subservient to your salvation? What do you say *to* them, so that they are bearable and so that you see that in the sovereignty of God they work your salvation and the salvation of all God's people, no matter the pain and heartache, and so that—wonder of wonders—you glory in your tribulations?

A very personal question too. The question is not merely, what will you say to persecution when it touches others, when another faces tribulation in his or her family? But what will you say when the sword of Jesus Christ divides in your life and family, among your close friends and relatives? What will you say when persecution—with its painful jibes, sneers, casting out, and hateful looks—comes and presses upon you, makes your life difficult, even impossible in the world, and leaves your table, stomach, and bank account empty?

The question is not what you will say to the peril of sickness when it wracks someone else's body. But what will you say when you are lying on a hospital bed, being tormented by the doctors and undergoing the surgeon's knife? What will you say to these things when they happen to you and to your life, which was rolling along so smoothly and then suddenly is interrupted so dreadfully?

The question is not what you will say to death as he appears in the families of other people. But what will you say to death when he appears to drag your loved ones off through his remorseless portal or when death comes and stands at the foot of your bed, and you must stare at his terrifying face?

That is the question to us while at the same time we have on our lips and in our hearts the confession of God's love toward us, so that we get on our knees and pray every morning and night, sometimes with groanings that can barely be uttered, and also confess that there is a glory that shall be revealed in us. What shall we say to these things when we say with our mouths and sing with our lips that we are the called according to God's purpose, that whom God did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren; and moreover, whom he did predestinate, those he also called, and whom he called, those he also justified, and whom he justified, those he also glorified? And then at the same time, we experience all these things in our lives that so powerfully seem to contradict the truth that God loves us, that he has adopted us for his children and heirs, and that eternal life is ours. What do we say who confess that there is no condemnation to us, and yet we have such contradictory experiences in the world?

What shall we say to these things?

Necessary question!

And there is the answer of sheer unbelief. "These things are not true! The bitter experiences, they are true.

We experience them. But why suffer them if these other things, such as predestination, redemption, calling, justification, and glorification, are not true?" Unbelief lives by sight and says that these things are not true. Unbelief says, "I cannot see them. I see these bitter experiences, and they are true. And those experiences are not worth whatever supposed glory awaits those who patiently endure them." Unbelief lives according to the things that are seen; and according to the things that are seen, so unbelief speaks! Bitter! Rebellious! Hardened unbelief! The bitter experiences only make the unbelief more bitter! Harder! More rebellious! "These things do not work for my good!" The bitter things of life work for the increased unbelief of the unbeliever.

We could say that all these things are simply the way of life in the world. And because this is so, we could adopt the philosophy of the unbelieving stoic. "Since these things are simply the way of life, then I will find happiness in being detached from them. I shall train myself such that it is nothing to me whether I suffer or do not suffer!"

We could answer with the worldling: "All these things are the mere troubles of life to be offset by the pleasures of sin and the joys of earthly life. I will get as much out of this life as I possibly can. A short and a merry life it will be for me! I will find my pleasure, as much pleasure as I can pack into this life before it is cut short and I fly away. Let us eat and drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!"

We could say with Jacob in Genesis 46:36, "All these things are against me!" What a painful outburst was Jacob's cry on that day when his sons returned from Egypt without Simeon, and they asked for Benjamin too. Long ago Jacob had lost one son when Jacob sent Joseph away to the hill country of Canaan to see how his brothers were doing, and Jacob never saw Joseph again, the only remnants of him being a blood-spattered little coat. Then again that painful wound was torn open when Jacob's sons whom he had sent down into Egypt to buy corn returned and told of the woeful tale of their treatment by the ruler of Egypt and how the ruler was keeping one son in bonds until the brothers returned with their youngest brother. Tribulation, distress, peril, famine. Jacob faced them; and in the face of them, he cried out, "All these things are against me! Ye have robbed me of my children. Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and Benjamin ye will take away!"

If God be for us, who can be against us! No matter how dark the way, no matter how bleak the prospects for the future, this fact remains absolutely unassailable and is the believer's answer to these things: "If God be for us, who can be against us!"

How absolute and all-encompassing is the answer: "If God is for us, who can be against us!"

A sure fact! It is not a question of whether God is for

us, and I do not know if he is for us or if he is not. But the *if* states a fact. If God is for us! Nothing can be against, but all things must be for us too!

That is the triumphant answer of faith; a faith that lives in hope; a faith that believes what it does not see; a faith that is saved by hope! Faith looks not on the things but on the God who is sovereign over those things. When we look on the things themselves and we dwell on them, then they multiply their ferocity, and we begin to give to them a power that they do not have. They are but persons, things, and happenings. All these things are under the providence and control of an almighty and sovereign God.

God! Almighty, sovereign, just, holy, righteous, gracious, good in all his works and ways, and wondrous in redeeming love. Above all things and in control of all things is the almighty and sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. All these things—whether height or depth, principalities or powers, things present or things to come, angels, devils, life, and death—are in God’s hand, so that they cannot move without his will, and in all their activity they must fulfill his will for the glory of his holy name and the salvation of his people.

This almighty God is for us! Faith makes that triumphant confession on a good ground.

God is not for everyone. The unbeliever. The stoic. The worldling. The reprobate ungodly in the world. God is not for them. Whether in their prosperity or in their poverty, God is against them. If they have the wealth of Midas, all that wealth works their eternal destruction. If they are poor as the poorest pauper, that poverty, sickness, or trouble works for them their eternal destruction. No, God is not for everyone.

God is for us. He is for those whom he loved from all eternity and in which love he predestinated them in Jesus Christ unto salvation and to the way of salvation, so that everything must serve as a means to bring them to their appointed and glorious end.

That God is for us means that God is on our side; or, more accurately, it means that we are taken to God’s side, are made of his party in the world, and we live before him always in that grace wherein we stand. We are incorporated into Jesus Christ, and God has made with us an eternal covenant of grace, promising to be a God to us and to our children and to avert all evil or turn it to our profit.

Let us make that confession today. We do not stoically ignore that there is evil in our lives. We bleed when we are cut; we are pained by bruises, physical and spiritual. But none of those things, no matter how they might loom large in our lives, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, nor can they ever turn that love away from us, nor thwart God’s will to do us good and to bring us to our eternal home.

And do you want to understand that God is for us?

Then look at Jesus. God spared not his own Son! Do you hear the love of God in that statement? God did not spare his Son all the anguish and travail and trouble of the cross. Faith says that because God spared not his own Son, God is for us. For us and for our salvation, God delivered up his most precious Son that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Can anything undo the perfect work of Jesus Christ at the cross, where God saw the labor and travail of Christ’s soul and was satisfied?

Faith says that because God spared not his own Son, God also justified us. Oh, not merely that God will justify us, but he has, he does, and he forever will behold us as his perfectly righteous people in Christ. God has forgiven us all of our sins and has accounted us righteous in Jesus Christ and heirs of eternal life. Being righteous in Christ Jesus, there can be no condemnation also in him.

Faith says that because it is Christ who died—yea, rather that he is risen again; who ascended to heaven to appear in the presence of God; who before the face of God makes continual intercession for us; and who is even at the right hand of God, so that by his sovereign hand Jesus Christ guides and controls all the events of heaven and earth and of our own lives for our benefit—then we are secure in him.

Faith says that because God did not leave us comfortless but has sent the Comforter to us and has come and taken his abode with us, we shall never be forsaken. And by the power of the same Spirit, we also in all of life cry out, “Abba, Father.”

Faith says in all these things that we are more than conquerors because we not only have the victory over them, but they must also serve us and our everlasting salvation.

That is the triumphant, glorious, complete answer of the believer to all these things.

If God be for us, who can be against us!

Let us say this always. Let us say this in our hearts, and let us say this with our lips with tear-streaked cheeks. Let us say it to ourselves, and let us say it to one another. We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through God, who loved us.

And with that confidence of faith, we face whatever God in his good pleasure sends to us. No matter the way. No matter the things. Faith has an answer for these things. “If God be for us, who can be against us!”

And God being with us, all things are well as we march straight on in our pilgrim’s journey here in this sin-cursed world toward our heavenly home.

—NJL

REFORMED? NOT AT ALL! (3): CREEDS AND DECREES

A Bag of Dirty Tricks

I have been treating Prof. Ronald Cammenga's diatribe that the members of the Reformed Protestant Churches are a pack of antinomians. All throughout the controversy that finally gave birth to the Reformed Protestant Churches, Cammenga was the slanderer in chief. Indeed, his whole ministry has been nothing but a quixotic quest for antinomians. In light of Professor Cammenga's preaching and writing, no one would ever think to ask the question whether anyone listening to him might sin that grace may abound. The only question anyone would ask is, what more must *I do* to be saved? Cammenga's theology is all do, do, do. His is not a grace theology. His theology is a works theology. For a couple of issues of *Sword and Shield*, I took a break from examining his nauseating, dishonest, and disgraceful writing, and now I return to finish analyzing his theology. It is his theology. It is not Reformed. He is not Reformed at all.

Remember that Professor Cammenga's theology is that faith and repentance are first, and then comes the forgiveness of sins. It is a purely temporal and sequential theology: first man does this (by grace, of course), and then God can do that. With regard to the subjects of forgiveness, repentance, and faith, Professor Cammenga denies that there is any sense in which there is the forgiveness of the sinner apart from and before the sinner's repentance. God does not and God cannot forgive the sinner his sins unless and until the sinner repents.

One should beware of a couple of tricks that Cammenga has up his sleeve as he deals his theological cards.

The first trick is that faith and repentance are two sides of one coin. Where the creeds teach faith alone, Cammenga—the snake—slips in repentance. He writes this:

After asking in Q. 76 what it is to eat the crucified body and drink Christ's blood, the Catechism answers that it is "to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ," and in that way "to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal." Faith in Christ, which

is always accompanied by repentance, clearly precedes "obtain[ing] the pardon of sin and life eternal."¹

Do you see what Cammenga does there? He simply adds repentance to faith. Faith and repentance are a package. Faith without repentance does not obtain anything, especially pardon of sin and life eternal. He is not teaching simply that the believer also repents. But Cammenga is teaching that faith does not do anything by itself until the believer repents. And note well that Cammenga does this in answer to the Heidelberg Catechism's question about what it means to eat Christ. Eating Christ is the personal appropriation of Christ and all of Christ's salvation. Eating Christ is life, salvation, glory, and blessedness. Belonging to the believer's eating Christ is the personal experience of the believer's justification that all his sins are forgiven and that he is righteous before God and an heir of eternal life. One could say that to eat Christ is to know, experience, and be assured of the forgiveness of sins. The Catechism says that the believer eats Christ by faith alone, but Cammenga with his trick simply adds repentance. He has the believer eating Christ by faith and by repentance, and that is the denial of justification by faith alone. That is Roman Catholic. That is not Reformed at all.

Further, the quote above demonstrates another of Cammenga's tricks in his use of the little phrase *in the way of*. He is arguing about what comes first and what comes second or what is before and what is after. He is arguing that before the sinner repents, God cannot forgive the sinner. He is arguing that without *A* being first, then *B* cannot come. And then he slips in an *in the way of*: "And in that way to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal." So Professor Cammenga says that in the way of believing, we obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal. So, first, he teaches that *in the way of* believing we have justification.

Now, that is not right. We have justification by the instrument of faith: *by faith*. We are justified by faith alone. Faith is not a *way* unto justification. Faith is not

1 Ronald Cammenga, "Antinomians? Without a Doubt (2)," *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 20 (September 1, 2022): 470. Page references for subsequent quotations from this article are given in text.

a road. Faith is a bond, knowledge, and assurance. Faith is the only instrument of justification. And faith justifies because it places us in communion with Christ and his righteousness, which when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of all our sins.

Second, Cammenga adds to his confusion by adding repentance to faith. So we obtain pardon of sin in the way of faith and in the way of repentance. Now let us assume that by *in the way of faith*, Cammenga means by *the instrument of faith*. That would be a charitable reading. But when he adds repentance to faith and says that in the way of faith and in the way of repentance, we obtain pardon of sin and life eternal, then he has two instruments of our justification. Now we are not justified by faith alone at all, but we are justified by faith and by repentance. And that is Roman Catholic. That is not Reformed at all.

Still more in his bag of tricks, Cammenga substitutes in the way of faith and repentance for the word “precedes” or the word *before*. He says that faith and repentance precede justification. That is his theology. Man must repent and believe first, and then and only then can and may God forgive that man. Then Cammenga wants to make this equivalent to *in the way of faith and repentance we are justified*. But *in the way of* and *before* are not synonyms. *Before* means that unless and until one repents, he cannot and may not be forgiven. *In the way of* means at the very least that there is a path that must be traveled from one place to another. What Cammenga is doing is corrupting how the phrase *in the way of* was used previously, and he is trying to give his doctrine of repentance by man before God may forgive a pedigree. The phrase *in the way of* ought to be discarded, if for no other reason than what Professor Cammenga and others are doing with the phrase. And what they mean by *in the way of* is *condition*. They will not come out and say that, but obtaining pardon of sin in the way of faith and repentance means that without faith and repentance, God cannot and may not forgive. That is conditional.

Another trick of Cammenga and of other Protestant Reformed men is to make a distinction between forgiveness of sins and justification. But the reader should note that there is no distinction between forgiveness and justification. Forgiveness of sins is one side of justification. All that one teaches about forgiveness of sins must likewise be said of justification. Professor Cammenga’s doctrine of forgiveness is his doctrine of justification. By that measure his doctrine of justification is not justification by faith alone but justification by a repentant and obedient faith. Those who listen to Cammenga and other Protestant Reformed men generally should beware of all these tricks, lest the hearers are taken in and tossed to and fro on the winds of false doctrine and are taken in by the sleight of men and

by cunning craftiness as those men lie in wait to deceive.

In his diatribe Professor Cammenga seeks to prove his doctrine from the creeds. As seen above, his treatment of the creeds is shameful. He adds to the Reformed creeds and takes from them as he sees fit. He does the same with other creeds. He cannot find anything in the creeds but a man-first theology.

He writes,

I want to show that the teaching that forgiveness precedes repentance is contrary to the Reformed confessions. The Reformed confessions bind every Reformed officebearer, presumably the leaders of the RPC as well. If a teaching is contrary to the confessions, the presupposition is that it is contrary to Holy Scripture. What do the confessions have to say about the relation between forgiveness and repentance? (470).

Indeed, what do the Reformed confessions say? I will examine the creedal articles that Cammenga draws to our attention as teaching his doctrine.

The “Before” of Article 24

Before I do that, though, I would point him to one article in the Belgic Confession, which he seems to have missed, that explicitly speaks of the relationship between faith, repentance, and forgiveness. Belgic Confession 24—the article on sanctification—says,

For it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 53–54)

“Even before we do good works,” we are justified. Now, herein is another warning about the tricks of Protestant Reformed men with language. They will say, “But repentance is not a good work.” For them repentance is in a category by itself. Repentance, as Cammenga says, is the other side of faith. And according to his argument, when article 24 of the Belgic Confession says “faith,” the article also means *repentance*. Thus Cammenga would have to explain the article this way: even before we do good works, we repent and believe, and in that way we are justified.

Over against Cammenga’s denial that repentance belongs to our works but is the other side of faith, I note that it has been Protestant doctrine—not merely Reformed doctrine but Protestant doctrine—that “when our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”² Repentance is the life of the believer. Such also is the view of the Heidelberg Catechism that treats

2 Martin Luther, “Ninety-Five Theses,” <https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>.

the entire third part of the Catechism, which contains instruction on good works and prayer, under the theme of conversion, one part of which is repentance. Repentance belongs to conversion, and conversion describes the believer's whole thankful life.

So the meaning of article 24 of the Belgic Confession is that we are justified before we do good works, including repentance. Now, how is that to be understood? It must be remembered that in the Belgic Confession justification is the experience of it; justification is the experience of the forgiveness of sins; justification is the experience of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believer. Thus also in this life, it is constantly the experience of the sinner that he knows and is assured of everlasting righteousness and eternal life before he does good works. That word "before" in article 24 so separates works—including repentance—from faith and justification that the justification of the sinner has nothing to do with works; it is as if works do not exist yet. The one who is justified is an ungodly person. The word "before" itself is not even temporal; "before" is logical. When the sinner is justified, it is by faith alone. Leave works and repentance out of justification.

To include repentance along with faith as the way to obtain pardon of sin is to teach justification by faith and works. Justification by faith and works is Roman Catholic doctrine. Rome was the great proponent of justification by faith and repentance. And now Cammenga is a great proponent too, and he has brought that very doctrine into the Protestant Reformed Churches. Let him deal with that statement in article 24 of the Belgic Confession before he starts barking about the Reformed creeds and how his doctrine is found in the creeds and about how creeds are supposed to bind officebearers. Why will he not be bound by that statement in article 24? He contradicts it with his doctrine that faith and repentance are before justification and forgiveness.

But Cammenga says that his doctrine *is* in the creeds, so I will examine his use of the creeds to support the idea that faith and repentance are before forgiveness, which is one part of our justification before God. I will not treat all the creeds that he quotes, but I will treat only some to point out that what Professor Cammenga finds in the creeds is not there and that the creeds actually stand against him in his doctrine that God cannot and does not forgive the sinner's sins unless and until the sinner repents and believes. This doctrine Cammenga phrases as repentance and faith *before* forgiveness or faith and repentance *as the way* to obtain pardon of sin.

Forgiveness at the Cross

In his use of question and answer 56 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Cammenga shows that he does not allow in any sense at all that there is forgiveness unless and until

the sinner repents. Question and answer 56 are the Heidelberg Catechism's treatment of the confession that we believe the forgiveness of sins. Cammenga writes,

The confession of "the forgiveness of sins" belongs to that which every believer confesses to be the proper work of the Holy Spirit. It is positioned between the confession of the holy, catholic church and the communion of the saints and "the resurrection of the body." This indicates that forgiveness of sins takes place simultaneous to the gathering of the church and prior to the final resurrection. Forgiveness of sins takes place in time and history, therefore, and not in eternity antecedent to the gathering of the church. (470)

There is a lot of just plain nonsense here. Professor Cammenga points out that the forgiveness of sins is placed between the communion of saints and the final resurrection. Then he draws the asinine conclusion that the order of the creed establishes a temporal order of salvation. By that kind of argument, then, Jesus descended into hell after he was buried. Then also according to this very question and answer, the Apostles' Creed establishes that there is first a church, then a communion of saints, and then forgiveness. And Cammenga, recognizing that all of this is silly, simply contradicts his own argument and says that this forgiveness "takes place simultaneous to the gathering of the church." Well, Professor Cammenga, which is it? Is the Catechism talking about what is before and after, or is the Catechism talking about what is simultaneous?

But Cammenga's main point here is not that repentance and faith are before forgiveness, but his point is that there is no forgiveness at all except in time and history. And he does not mean simply in time and history, but he means that there is no forgiveness until the sinner repents and believes; God does not and God cannot forgive the sinner unless and until the sinner repents.

But Professor Cammenga must have forgotten to check the proof texts that the Catechism includes with its statement of doctrine. The creed cites 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21 where we read,

19. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.
21. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Therefore, what the Catechism is not teaching in its statement of doctrine is that there is *only* forgiveness if and when the sinner repents. But the Catechism is very much teaching that God at the cross did not impute the

trespasses of his people unto them. This is a summary in a few words of their forgiveness and justification at the cross. In other words, when the Catechism teaches that we confess the forgiveness of sins, it means that the church of the saints confesses that at the cross of Christ forgiveness and justification were accomplished and that this truth is declared to the church in the gospel as that in which the saints' salvation consists. There is forgiveness! We are saved! At the cross! There is forgiveness as a certain reality for the church. It is not that there will be forgiveness if and when and only after repentance. There is forgiveness of sin. This does not mean that there is forgiveness available for the sinner only after he repents. This is really what Cammenga must teach. He must teach that the cross of Christ made forgiveness available for all those who repent and believe. But that is just sheer Arminianism. The Reformed faith is very different. The cross of Christ accomplished the forgiveness of the elect church. The elect are forgiven from Calvary. I am not here making the argument about forgiveness in eternity. Cammenga hates that doctrine and views it as antinomian. But he will not even confess that there is forgiveness *at the cross of Christ*. For Cammenga there is not and there may not be forgiveness of the sinner unless and until the sinner repents.

This is not the meaning of question and answer 56 at all. They are a confession of the church that she is forgiven at Calvary. That is the nature of a confession of faith. "I believe that there *is* a holy, catholic church. I believe that there *is* the communion of saints. I likewise believe that there *is* the forgiveness of sins because of the cross of Christ. I believe that God will not remember my sins as an abiding fact because I believe that Christ died on the cross." I will sin. I sin all my life long. I sin in all that I do. I have to struggle with my sinful human nature all my life long. But this fact remains true and unchanging: God will not remember my sins or sinfulness. He has imputed to me Christ's righteousness. He will do that because he has already done that at the cross, where God did not impute my sins to me, but God imputed my sins to Christ in order that I be made—at the cross—the righteousness of God in Christ.

The Catechism is not teaching anything even remotely approximating what Professor Cammenga is teaching. He corrupts the Catechism and robs the believer of his only comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ, in whom the believer has now and forever the forgiveness of sins. Cammenga writes, "Clearly, forgiveness follows and does not precede repentance." Clearly, this is not the point of the Catechism at all. Clearly, the Catechism teaches that there *is* forgiveness at the cross. Clearly, the Catechism backs this up with a reference to 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21. Clearly, Cammenga is not Reformed at all.

A Liberated Covenant Doctrine

Professor Cammenga's treatment of question and answer 70 shows that he is not only Roman Catholic in his doctrine of justification, but he is also liberated Reformed in his doctrine of the covenant.

First, I quote the Catechism:

Q. 70. What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?

A. It is to receive of God the remission of sins freely, for the sake of Christ's blood, which He shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin and lead holy and unblamable lives. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 109)

I quote in full what Cammenga writes about question and answer 70:

Q&A 70 of the Catechism speaks of the spiritual reality of baptism, which applies to the elect who are baptized. For them baptism is "to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ." And what does that entail? "It is to receive of God the remission of sins freely, for the sake of Christ's blood, which He has shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross." After his baptism, as he matures in the faith, the child of God appropriates the spiritual significance of his baptism. At that point he "receive[s] of God the remission of [his] sins freely." Once again, remission (forgiveness) of sins takes place during and not before the lifetime of the child of God. (470)

This is a total corruption of the Reformed doctrine of baptism, the covenant, and the promise. This total corruption is thoroughly Schilderian and liberated in its conceptions. The subject here must be applied to the infant. Professor Cammenga himself has in view the infant. This infant is baptized. In that baptism there is a promise of God: "I will forgive your sins." This promise is rooted in election and made sure at the cross of Jesus Christ, where Christ accomplished that forgiveness. The sacrament of baptism itself is the seal of the righteousness that is by faith alone without works. But according to Cammenga the child does not have this forgiveness until he believes. And remember that for Cammenga repentance is the other side of faith. Until—and you must say *if*—the child repents and believes, he has not received the remission of sins. This is now a fully conditional promise in the covenant of grace. The promise of God for the remission of sins waits on and is dependent upon the child and the child's faith and repentance. Notice how explicit Cammenga is:

“At that point he ‘receive[s] of God the remission of [his] sins freely.’” The infant child does not have the remission of sins until the point of his faith and repentance. If words have meaning, this is what Cammenga wrote: “At that point...” Not before this faith and repentance of the child, but “at that point” of his faith and repentance, the child “receive[s] of God the remission of [his] sins freely.” The promise of forgiveness here does not actually apply to the infant until he matures in the faith and responds to the promise in faith and repentance. Apart from his faith and repentance, the infant does not have remission. The baptized person has forgiveness only in the way of his faith and repentance. And so when Cammenga adds, “Once again, remission (forgiveness) of sins takes place during and not before the lifetime of the child of God,” Professor Cammenga is dishonest. Forgiveness for Cammenga is not only restricted to the lifetime of the child of God; but also during that child’s lifetime, forgiveness is restricted to the moment of his faith and repentance. Cammenga writes, “At that point he ‘receive[s]’...” The infant does not receive remission before that, regardless of the fact that God promised remission, and regardless of the fact that Christ accomplished remission at the cross. And this means for Cammenga that God’s promise in the covenant is, in fact, a conditional promise. And that is not Reformed at all.

The baptism form says about infants,

Although our young children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, for as they are without their knowledge partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 259)

That is lovely! That is Reformed! That is comforting! That is God-first, God-centered theology. That is grace! The children partake of condemnation in Adam, and they do not know a thing about it. The children partake of justification in Christ, and they do not know a thing about it. They have forgiveness because God promised it. They have it without a tear of repentance and without one word of faith. They have it because they are incorporated into Jesus Christ by election and by faith. And being members of Christ’s body by faith, all of Christ’s righteousness is abundantly sufficient to acquit them of all their sins, original as well as personal, and most of which they have not even committed yet. Parents are duty bound, according to the form, to instruct their children herein. The children are to be instructed in the reality of their forgiveness that they had when they could not even repent and when the only reality of faith for them was that it was their bond with Christ. Cammenga does not tell us what happens to children who die in their infancy. Perhaps he resorts to

the same sort of theology that Professor Gritters recently sucked out of his thumb, in which Gritters had infants repenting in heaven because, after all, there is no forgiveness without repentance. Can no one in the Protestant Reformed Churches see, and does anyone in the churches care that this is the same covenant theology that was rejected in 1953 in the Protestant Reformed Churches? Cannot anyone see, and does anyone care that Cammenga is teaching a conditional covenant in which the baptized child has the promise, but the promise does not come into the child’s possession until he repents? Cannot anyone see that this is not a stitch different from the liberated covenant theology of Klaas Schilder and company?

Leaving Out Election

Professor Cammenga finds the same sort of man-centered theology in the Canons. He refers the readers of the *Standard Bearer* to Canons 2.5. Remember that he is proving the theology that faith and repentance are before remission. Remission does not happen in eternity. Remission does not happen at the cross. Remission does not happen even when the infant is baptized. God can promise remission to the infant, but the infant does not have the promise unless and until he matures in the faith and repents and believes. I can be brief here.

Cammenga writes,

The command to repent and believe must be accompanied by the promise of the gospel. The promise is that they who “believe in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” The promise of everlasting life is joined to the command to repent and believe. Only they whose sins are forgiven enter into everlasting life; those whose sins are not forgiven perish. The promise, therefore, is essentially that those who repent and believe will have the forgiveness of their sins. Having the forgiveness of the sins over which they have repented, they will enter into life everlasting. Forgiveness follows repentance and precedes everlasting life. Repentance, followed by forgiveness, followed by everlasting life—this is the biblical order. (471)

But Cammenga leaves out of the biblical order something very important. It is something that the Canons do not leave out. That is election. The point of the Canons is that the gospel must be preached wherever God in his *good pleasure* sends the gospel. The gospel does not come to an undifferentiated mass of people, along with the command to repent and believe, and then men distinguish themselves. The preaching of the gospel proceeds from God’s eternal decree. The gospel efficaciously comes to those whom God has from eternity loved and

whom he has at the cross already reconciled to himself. So in explanation of the coming of the preaching and as an explanation of faith in Christ, who is preached, the Canons say in 2.8,

For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for the bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 163)

The order is not, in fact, as Cammenga states, “Repentance, followed by forgiveness, followed by everlasting life.” The order is election! Election! Cammenga constantly leaves out election. Along with that he leaves out the saving efficacy of the death of Christ. Note well, the Canons teach that the death of Christ was efficacious, and what that means is not simply that on the basis of Christ’s death the elect will be justified when they repent and believe. But the efficacious death of Christ means that he accomplished fully and completely the justification and salvation of the elect at the cross, which salvation is *extended* to the elect through the gift of justifying faith. That this is the viewpoint of the Canons in this article is made plain later when the same article says that “the Father...should confer upon them [the elect and them only] faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death” (163–64). In the language of the Canons, the death of Christ purchased faith and all the other saving benefits, including the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness was as real at the cross as the elects’ union with Christ and as his suffering and atoning death. The elect had been forgiven long before they repented. God brings the elect to repentance not so that he can forgive them, but because it was his will that they have all that Christ purchased for them, including the knowledge of their salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

When Professor Cammenga actually gets around to talking about election, he deprives election of all force. So he writes,

According to Canons III/IV.10, that some obey the call of the gospel and are converted “must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son.” God’s conferring “faith and repentance”—the two always together—is the beginning of the deliverance of His elect people. That beginning is followed by rescue from the power of darkness, which

includes certainly forgiveness of sins. The divine order of repentance followed by forgiveness is confirmed once again. (471)

The beginning of the deliverance of God’s people is surely not God’s conferring on them faith and repentance. If that were the case, that would make the decree as good as a dead letter. The beginning of the deliverance of God’s people is, in fact, an eternal beginning. That was the issue with the Arminians at Dordt. When they would speak of election, they made it a dead letter. The beginning of man’s deliverance was in time for the Arminians. The beginning of deliverance was in time according as man responded to the call of the gospel. Time was what mattered to the Arminians, and they denigrated eternity. Cammenga does nothing different. He is not Reformed at all. What Reformed man could say that the beginning of the deliverance of God’s people is repentance and faith? The decree is their salvation. The cross is their salvation. They are saved before they shed one tear. The Reformed fathers insisted that the beginning of deliverance was in eternity and that this beginning is the cause of all that follows.

Professor Cammenga’s whole handling of the Canons is laughable. Remember that the Reformed fathers were arguing against the Arminians, who made faith and the imperfect works of faith, including repentance, to be conditions. Man must do the works first, and then God will give what he promises. And that is the theology that Cammenga finds in the Canons. One would think that the Reformed fathers lost their minds. Is it really the case that they were arguing first repentance, then forgiveness, and then eternal life? They, in fact, argued the opposite. They insisted on an election theology and also then the inevitability of the salvation of God’s elect people. The Reformed fathers were arguing not for what man must do to receive a certain blessing of God, but they were insisting that all salvation and all its benefits proceed from divine election. The fathers insisted not on what man must do, but they insisted on the inevitability of what the elect do: repent and believe. The fathers were not arguing about what came first, second, third, and fourth, but they were arguing that all salvation proceeds from election as salvation’s cause! And the fathers were intent on showing over against the Arminians’ slander—which is really in essence Cammenga’s slander—that while man does repent and believe, that his repenting and believing are of God, who works in his people both to will and to do of his good pleasure. The Arminians would never have had a problem with Cammenga’s Canons. After the Arminians finished talking about everything man must do, they could get back to election. But the problem of the Arminians, which is the same problem as Cammenga’s, was that

they did not begin with election. Repentance first. Then forgiveness. Then eternal life. Then election.

So much for the Reformed creeds binding every officebearer. Apparently, the creeds do not bind Professor Cammenga. He should know that for ages there have been Reformed officebearers who have paid lip service to the creeds. And he is one of them. He takes what he wants from the creeds and changes what he does not want.

Sounds Arminian

Still more in light of Cammenga's before and after language—repentance before forgiveness—he should know that the Canons of Dordt put this language alongside the language of conditions as equivalent expressions and that the Canons put both this language of before and after and the language of conditions in the mouths of the Arminians. So says Canons 1.9,

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

Homer Hoeksema, in his commentary on the Canons, notes a major translation issue with the opening sentence of Canons 1.9 as translated in our English version:

This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness.

Hoeksema proposes instead this substitute translation:

This same election was not accomplished out of foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other quality or disposition, as the cause or condition required beforehand...in the person to be elected, but is unto faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness.³

Canons 1.9 is Dordt's attack on the main Arminian redoubt in the teaching of election by foreseen faith. The Arminians at Dordt taught that faith and the other activities are the condition of election that is required beforehand and that which God also then sees beforehand.

I might remark here that when conditional theology makes faith the condition, the theology cannot ever simply stop at faith, but conditional theology keeps adding conditions. There is condition after condition after condition that is added. To faith the Arminians added holiness and perseverance. We had a perfect example of that with Reverend Koole's false doctrine. In October 2018 he taught that faith is that which man must do to be saved. By November 2020 he was teaching that works are also what man must do to be saved. The error of conditions always eventually takes over all of salvation and finally all of theology, so that conditional theology reconstructs the doctrine of God too. So soon as faith is admitted as a condition, the God of sovereign election becomes the idol god of open theism, who has a mutual relationship with man and responds to him.

I note here too that the fathers at Dordt put the language of conditions in the mouths of the Arminians and condemned that language. There was no excuse in the Reformed churches after Dordt for Reformed men to use the word *conditions*. And there are no conditions in a Reformed sense. Nothing that man does is the condition or cause of what God does.

And I want to make a note here that the language of "required beforehand" is also put in the mouths of the Arminians and condemned. Really, with that phrase "required beforehand," we have the Reformed definition of what a *condition* is. A *condition* is that which is "required beforehand," so that an activity of man is required before God can perform what he performs.

Note that and see that this is very relevant. We are doing battle with a theology of conditions that cleverly disguises itself as interested in merely what is before and what is after. But you have to ask those who teach this theology, *why* is what is before and what is after so important? And they will expose themselves when they say that faith and repentance are required before God can do what he promised he will do. By that explanation they also expose themselves as conditional. The Protestant Reformed ministers and professors can talk only about what is required beforehand: repentance is required before forgiveness; faith is required before justification; a life of good works is required before blessing. This language is fundamentally Arminian and has completely lost sight of God's decree. The Reformed

3 Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers: An Exposition of the Canons of Dordrecht*, 2nd ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2013), 48.

language speaks of election as an inexhaustible fountain out of which flows from God to his people all that he has decreed to give to them.

Homer Hoeksema also takes note, and I point out too, that heretics and false teachers always play hocus-pocus with words. The men whom we are dealing with in the Protestant Reformed Churches are always playing hocus-pocus with words too. So they mention *election, grace, Jesus Christ, covenant, repentance, and faith*, but they are constantly injecting new meanings into these terms, and you always have to ask, “But what do you mean by that?” So they say that we are saved by grace alone, and everyone thinks that everyone else is saying the same thing; but in reality what I mean by saved by grace alone is that I am not saved by works at all; and what they mean by saved by grace alone is that God enables a person to believe, and God enables that person to do good works, and that person is saved by his act of faith and in the way of his obedience. Heretics trade in words like a card shark trades in cards.

So the Arminians played word games too. The Arminians spoke of an election to faith; they spoke of faith as a gift of God; but they would never say that God gives faith to whomsoever he wills, and whom he wills he hardens. They would never say that faith flows out of God’s eternal decree of election. Hoeksema makes a very important point: the lie while claiming to make theology simple makes theology a muddle. The Arminians multiplied conditions. They multiplied decrees of election. They multiplied meanings of words.

So also today the Protestant Reformed ministers and professors multiply distinction upon distinction, and their words can have so many different meanings. And if you ask the average people in the pew what their church teaches, they would be unable to tell you except to say that they are saved in the way of obedience. They show that they have caught the drift; and without all the clever distinctions made to cover the lie, they state the lie baldly. They have been taken in by the cunning craftiness of men.

Election the Cause

The Reformed make election the cause of faith and of every saving benefit. The Reformed say in Canons 1.9, “Therefore election is the fountain...from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation...as its fruits and effects” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 157). That word “effects” is important. These things are fruits of election, so that election is a kind of root that bears fruits in the hearts and lives of the elect. Election is also a cause and effect of every saving good mentioned by the Canons: “faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation,

and finally eternal life itself.” Election is no mere dead decree or mere impotent will, but election is the living will of the living God. And what God decrees is perfect in him; and what God decrees, he carries out, so that his will bears fruit and has effects in the lives of the elect. Election is unto faith. Election is unto holiness. Election is unto eternal life. Remember those three kinds of expressions used by the Canons to express the relationship between election and salvation or between election and faith, obedience, holiness, and eternal life. *Election is a fountain. Election bears fruits. Election causes an effect.* Let us just speak, for example, about faith. Election is the fountain of faith, so that faith flows out of the fountain into the elect like waters from the fountain. Election is a kind of eternal root that bears the fruit of faith in the hearts of the elect. Election is the cause of the effect of faith in the hearts of the elect. And then we must never lose sight of the truth that the decree is the decreeing God, so that the overflowing fountain, the deep source, and the divine cause of salvation is God in every respect. It is simply impossible in light of Canons 1.9 to maintain that there are things that man must do before God can do something else. You simply have a different god—not merely a different doctrine of salvation but a different god—at that point. He is a god whose saving work is out of man just as the god of Arminianism has his decree out of the activity of man.

And it is Professor Cammenga’s corruption of God and God’s decree that comes out clearly in his articles. Cammenga has cast off decretal theology. The pressing question is, why is it so important for Cammenga that repentance, as he says, is before forgiveness? Cammenga asks some questions in his articles that shed light on how far he is from the Reformed faith when he says that repentance is before forgiveness. He asks,

Why ought the sinner to repent if his sin is already forgiven? Why ought the church member under discipline repent of sin on account of which he is going to be excommunicated if his sin is already forgiven by God? Why ought there be any call to repentance in the preaching of the gospel if forgiveness has already been granted by God? Why ought there be any warning that, if the sinner does not repent, he will perish if God has from eternity forgiven the sinner? Why should the child of God at day’s end humble himself before God and plead for the forgiveness of the sins committed against His most high majesty if he already enjoys the blessing of God’s forgiveness of his sin?⁴

4 Ronald Cammenga, “Antinomian? Without a Doubt (1),” *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 18 (July 2022): 420.

Then, as the very last sentence of his seventh article, he asks, “For if forgiveness takes place in eternity, what need is there for repentance in the lifetime of the Christian?”⁵

That is a full-throated attack on the decree by means of questions that for Professor Cammenga are rhetorical. The answer of Cammenga to the question of why the sinner should repent if he is already forgiven in eternity and at the cross is that the sinner need not repent. The sinner need not ask for forgiveness of sins. He need not repent. He need not turn if he is under discipline. And those questions show that Cammenga has never tasted the gospel and knows nothing of the decree of God. The need and necessity of all these things is the decree and the decreeing God himself. Because God willed these things, he also brings to pass what he willed. And those questions of Cammenga also point out that the decree for him is a mere potentiality—the decree is not real at all until time.

Those questions are an attack on the very concept of God’s decree. The questions are anti-decretal, and they come from a mind and out of a heart that is anti-decretal as well. The questions come from a conception of the decree of God as a mere blueprint of what God will do, a blueprint that becomes real and actual only when God does what he decrees. And that is the most charitable reading I can place on Professor Cammenga’s words. I say that in reality the questions are anti-decretal. They are fundamentally Arminian in their conceptions and origin. You could just as well ask the question, “If Christ was crucified in eternity, then why did he even bother about dying in time?” Indeed, in light of what Cammenga says, you must ask that about the entire decree of God. If God decreed salvation in eternity, then why bother with time? And Cammenga denigrates the whole decree and the whole Reformed conception of the decree. Cannot anyone see that this is the viewpoint of Cammenga? How could this pass in the Protestant Reformed Churches if the whole denomination is not exactly where Professor Cammenga is? He has taught an entire generation of men this viewpoint, and with this viewpoint they no longer have a decree. The decree of God does not do anything in their theology. And with that kind of a decreeless theology, they also have a different god.

I would also point out that this view of the decree is entirely different from Herman Hoeksema’s view. Cammenga barks about Hoeksema and the Protestant Reformed fathers, but Cammenga must not have a clue about what they actually taught. Anyone with a stitch of honesty would know that Hoeksema and the rest of the orthodox fathers would never have asked such a question

as, “If God forgave sins in eternity, then what need is there of repentance?” They would have reprobated such a viewpoint as entirely unreformed and Arminian, and so it is. Specifically, with regard to the decree and the forgiveness of sins, Hoeksema wrote,

God is an eternally active God. His works are not only known unto Him from all eternity, but are also in Him eternally perfect. . . His works are from eternity to eternity perfect in Himself.⁶

God not only knows the works, that is, he knows what will happen by virtue of having decreed it, but also those works are perfect in him! That is glorious! God is the rock, and all his works are perfect.

Applying that viewpoint of the counsel to salvation and specifically to the forgiveness of sins, Hoeksema wrote,

First of all, we certainly may speak of our justification from eternity. We are justified in the decree of election from before the foundation of the world. . . In His eternal counsel God has ordained Christ as Mediator and head of all the elect. And therefore it must be true that God knew the elect in Christ as justified from eternity. The elect do not become righteous before God in time by faith, but they are righteous in the tribunal of God from before the foundation of the earth. God beholds them in eternity not as sinners, but as perfectly righteous, as redeemed, as justified in Christ.⁷

Is that not altogether lovely and comforting? Does that not trumpet God as God? And that bears no resemblance to Professor Cammenga’s question, “If God forgave sins in eternity, then what need is there of repentance?” I do not know if Cammenga will ever get around to trying to prove that Protestant Reformed theologians taught what he teaches, but he should save himself the embarrassment of trying.

The Protestant Reformed denomination can perish with Cammenga and his theology, and she will. But the ministers and professors should stop barking about being Reformed and about being the spiritual heirs of Protestant Reformed theology. A truly Protestant Reformed man who believed Protestant Reformed truth would never ask the questions that Cammenga does. Cammenga is not Reformed. He is not historically Protestant Reformed either. He is Arminian and Roman Catholic to the core. And he is an antinomian too because he took a vow to defend the churches from the very theology that he embraces and with which he sullies the churches, contrary to his vow.

His theology has no grace in it. It is a theology of works. And that theology is not Reformed at all.

—NJL

5 Ronald Cammenga, “Antinomians? Without a Doubt (7),” *Standard Bearer* 99, no. 18 (July 2023): 425.

6 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), 153.

7 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 502.

Another year has come to a close, and another is upon us. Time like an ever-rolling stream bears all its sons away. The passing of a year is always a time of reflection. Through it we are deeply impressed with the eternality of our heavenly Father, who changes not and with whom one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. He remains ever the same in his glorious perfection and in his gracious purpose for the salvation of his elect church. We are also made profoundly aware of our own quick passing from the scene of the earth and of the nearness of the end of the earth and the entire universe itself. Who are we and who are our children that God should have had such mercy on us?

This reflection for me extends also to *Sword and Shield*. The Lord has been good to us and has prospered the labors of the magazine. Our prayer for the new year is that through the writings of the magazine the readers are encouraged and edified in order to continue in the battle of faith and in their pilgrims' journeys here below. Our prayer is likewise that the Lord uses the

magazine as a mighty weapon against the lie to defeat it and overthrow it. May he drive his enemies before him and make them to be found liars against his people. Another issue, then, has found its way into your hands. In the issue you will find excellent submissions for *Running Footmen* by Todd Ferguson and for our new *Insights* rubric from Jeremy Langerak.

In light of these submissions, I point out that the contributions that come in from the office of all believer are edifying and put a kind of exclamation point on the emphasis of the *Sword and Shield* and of the Reformed Believer's Publishing organization that we are a believers' organization. We are not an arm of any church institute, but we exist by right of Christ's anointing of his people, so that they know the truth, love the truth, and confess the truth, especially in the face of those who would censure it.

For the rest the issue contains the usual cast of characters. May the Lord bless the content of the issue to your hearts.

—NJL

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

THE OFFICE OF ALL BELIEVER (3): THE HOLY SPIRIT

Introduction

The believer is a member of Christ by faith and thus is a partaker of the anointing of Jesus Christ. The believer is a prophet, priest, and king. The believer executes his office in the world by confessing the name of Christ as a prophet, by presenting himself as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving to God as a priest, and by fighting against sin and Satan as a king. The office of all believer is of "Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Rev. 1:5–6).

Jesus Christ is the officebearer *par excellence*, God's

perfect officebearer, eternally ordained to represent the invisible God, who revealed the will of God, consecrated himself to his Father, and stood as the almighty king, subduing sin and Satan. At his baptism Jesus Christ received from the Father the Holy Spirit without measure, who anointed and equipped Christ for his work that the Father had given him to do in behalf of God's kingdom and covenant. In that work Jesus Christ was perfectly obedient and perfectly faithful as the servant of Jehovah. Jesus Christ revealed the Father in all his glory. He revealed to us God's eternal plan of salvation. Jesus Christ is the exegesis of God. He is the explanation of all that God has decreed. Jesus Christ is the reason for all that exists and all that shall come to pass. He is the one for whom and by whom all things were made.

And Jesus Christ was faithful all the way to the death of the cross, where he drank the cup of God's wrath down to its bitter dregs. Christ was faithful as God's officebearer in the place of his people, who were nothing but unfaithful. Christ was born of a woman, under the law in the fullness of time. The Word became flesh! God became man. Christ entered into that flesh and suffered in that flesh. He entered into our death and misery. And he shed his precious blood as the perfect sacrifice for sin. Truly, it is finished.

And now, as the ascended priest-king, Christ stands before the face of God, presenting his perfect sacrifice as our intercessor. As king, he rules over all things by his might and over his church by grace. He is the glorious, exalted, risen king! What glory! What power! What honor forever and ever.

And as the ascended mediator, Jesus Christ received the Spirit and pours out that Spirit upon his church. The office of all believer became a reality at Pentecost. Christ, receiving the Spirit of the Father, in turn poured the Spirit out upon his elect people. All God's people have the Spirit of Christ. And all God's people are prophets, priests, and kings, partaking of Christ's anointing by faith. They all have the anointing of the Holy One and are equipped to their office. "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 John 2:20). You know all things! The union of prophet, priest, and king in the New Testament believer was realized at Pentecost.

16. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;
17. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:
18. And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:16-18)

Being members of Christ by faith, we have the privilege and the right to function as officebearers. We have the obligation and the calling. We have the volition and the ability to be and to function as God's friend-servants in the midst of a perverse and ungodly world. We have the must, the may, the can, and the will of serving God in this holy office only in and through our Lord Jesus Christ by the operation of his Holy Spirit.

Who the Spirit Is

The Holy Spirit in scripture has many names that describe him and his work. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter, for Christ promised the Spirit to abide in his church after his ascension. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). Christ would go away for a time, and he

would ascend bodily into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. But Christ would at no time be absent from his people. He would abide with them by his Spirit, whom Christ would give unto them. The peculiar office of the Holy Spirit is to make God's people partakers of Christ and all his blessings, including the knowledge and assurance that we belong to our faithful savior, Jesus Christ, which the Heidelberg Catechism explains as our only comfort.

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth. The Spirit leads his church into all truth. The Spirit reveals to the church all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ. The Spirit does not speak concerning himself, but he speaks of what he has heard, which is the eternal Word. The Spirit then does not lead the church into the lies of man and salvation by man, but the Spirit leads her and guides her so that the church of all ages confesses the one faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of holiness as the sanctifier. He is the agent or worker of salvation. In every step in the order of salvation, it is proper that we include in each definition the words, "...is the work of the triune God through the Spirit of Christ." In regeneration, calling, faith, justification, and sanctification, the Holy Spirit of Christ applies to us and brings into our possession that which is stored up in Christ. As God, the Holy Spirit is absolutely above time, and every benefit of salvation that is given to God's people is eternally perfect in the mind of God. You are elected from all eternity in Christ to be given salvation and all the heavenly blessings in Christ by the Spirit. Who would ever want man and his responsibility for salvation? If ever man and his responsibility begin to push out God and his sovereignty, pitch man and all his works out of the church. And let the charge come that the preaching is too one-sided, that there is too much about God and not enough about what man must do. The Spirit is the sanctifier. His work is not that he enables man to attain the next installment of salvation. The Spirit's work is not that he gives man the power by grace to do what is required before God does something else. Then all you have are prerequisites and conditions for man to perform before God blesses a man. The Holy Spirit applies and brings into our possession consciously what we have by right in Jesus Christ. Being justified in Christ, we have the right to be delivered from the power and dominion of sin as a spiritual, ethical power, and the Holy Spirit realizes that deliverance.

The Holy Spirit is the promise. But how? Is not the promise Jesus Christ, as given in Genesis 3:15 and all the texts that reveal this one promise in its astounding depth? At his ascension Christ received the promise of the Father. The Spirit is called the Spirit of promise because it is by the Spirit that we receive the whole Christ, the Christ who came in our flesh, who was born in a lowly cattle

trough and suffered all his life long, who suffered to the accursed tree of Calvary, who died and was buried and rose again the third day, and who ascended into heaven at God's right hand and will soon return in judgment. The Spirit is the promise because the Spirit is how we receive Christ and how Christ abides and dwells in us.

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, for he is the true and eternal God. The Holy Spirit is God. He is the third person of the Trinity. He is coeternal and coequal with God. The Spirit is of the same essence, majesty, and glory as the Father. There at the beginning was the Spirit, brooding over the face of the deep. There at the incarnation the power of the highest overshadowed Mary. There in the New Testament church, the Spirit dwells in his people, in whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy temple in the Lord, building for him a habitation.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption, whereby the Spirit testifies with our spirits that we are the sons and daughters of God. The Spirit bears witness to our spirits. To bear witness means to say something and to be a surety for it. And the Spirit speaks to us so that we have assurance. He does not speak mystically, but he speaks in connection with the word. The Spirit takes the content of the word, and he applies that word to our hearts. The personal assurance of the believer is wrought by the Spirit, the content of which is the word.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of righteousness and judgment (John 16:8–10). When he comes, the Spirit reproves the world of sin because the world believes not. The Spirit reproves of righteousness because Christ went to the Father, and we see him no more. The Spirit gives the conviction of sin that man has no righteousness of himself and that he needs a righteousness outside of himself. The Spirit reproves of judgment because the prince of this world is judged. Christ alone holds the kingdom and has subdued and triumphed over Satan. Jesus Christ through his Spirit convicts of sin, declares righteousness, and judges all creatures in the light of the gospel. The gospel as it sounds forth is judgment, and the gospel judges all men and all creatures; there is no escaping that judgment. The proof is that Satan himself has not escaped that judgment and is judged. And the Spirit is the power of the preaching of the gospel. He is the efficacy of that gospel that realizes God's decree of election and reprobation. The Spirit irresistibly advances the kingdom of God as an unstoppable force.

The Holy Spirit is called the eternal Spirit, the Spirit of grace, the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of life. He is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation and knowledge. All men by nature are ignorant and foolish, and we along with all men would ever only hold the truth under in unrighteousness to our damnation. But the Spirit searches the deep things of God in God's own triune being, and the

Spirit reveals those deep mysteries to us; the Spirit reveals all the spiritual things that are freely given us by God.

This truly awesome, marvelous Spirit the believer receives, partaking of the anointing of Christ by faith.

In Christ

The Holy Spirit is God. He is neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but he proceeds from both the Father and the Son. God the Father breathes the Holy Spirit to the Son, and the Son breathes the Holy Spirit back to the Father. The Holy Spirit is the consecration of the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the bond of the Father and the Son in the Trinity. From all eternity the Son is in the bosom of the Father, embracing one another in the closest possible communion. The Son is in the Father, and the Father is in the Son. That "in-ness" of the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. That is the intimacy of the divine life. It is life in the Spirit. God with God *in* God. The Father and Son are in one another by the Holy Spirit.

And the incarnated Christ, who walked on the earth in our flesh, is in the Father. Christ according to his human nature is in the triune God. That means that our flesh is partaker of the divine life.

The same "in-ness" that the Father and the Son have in the triune life, and the same "in-ness" that God and Jesus Christ as the Word become flesh have in the Holy Spirit, we also have. In John 14, in response to Philip's question if Christ would show the disciples the Father, Christ said to Philip,

9. Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?
10. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?...
11. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me...

And then later in the chapter, Christ promised the Comforter to the disciples and to his elect people. Although Christ would ascend into heaven to sit at God's right hand, Christ would not leave his people comfortless but would send the Spirit of truth, whom God's people know, for the Spirit dwells with them and is in them.

18. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.
19. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.
20. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

The Holy Spirit is the explanation of Christ's words. Christ is in the Father, and the Father in Christ. You are in

Christ, and Christ is in you. That is the Holy Spirit. He is found in the word “in.” “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

And so the elect sinner is in Christ. The elect child of God is made a member of Christ by faith and thus is made a partaker of Christ’s anointing. To be a member of Christ by faith is essentially synonymous with the scriptures’ oft-repeated phrase of being “in Christ.” “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:30). Or in Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” Being “in Christ” is to be a member of Christ by faith.

For the believer to be in Christ and joined to him is to have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the bond; he is the union of the believer to Christ. When one of God’s elect children receives faith, then he has received the Holy Spirit. That child can never fall away or be stolen away. He can never be lost as a sheep in the fold of the Good Shepherd. He is *in* Christ. The believer is forever joined to Christ the head in the unbreakable, unshakable, immovable bond of the Holy Spirit. When we conceive of faith as a bond, therefore, we can say that faith is as strong as God himself because the bond of faith is God the Holy Spirit.

And the office of all believer is the fruit of this bond, this Spirit, this union to Jesus Christ. Why are you called a Christian? Because you are a member of Christ by faith and thus are partaker of his anointing.

Anointing Oil

In the Old Testament the officebearer was anointed with oil. The oil was poured over the head of the king, priest, or prophet, and the oil would run down his garments. And that man who was anointed was called by God to function officially in the kingdom as the visible representative of the invisible God.

The oil in that anointing was symbolic of the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 61:1 the gift of the Holy Spirit is connected with the anointing of the officebearer:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

The word “anointed” means *to draw the hand over*. In anointing Elisha, Elijah would have put his hand over Elisha, pouring the oil over him. Similarly, in ordaining a man to the ministry in the New Testament, the laying on of hands or *drawing the hand over* is symbolic of the anointing and equipping to that office by the Holy Spirit.

That anointing oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit is also the meaning of the vision in Zechariah 4.

1. And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep,
2. And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof:
3. And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.
4. So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?
5. Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.
6. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

In this vision the prophet Zechariah beholds a candlestick with seven lamps. Above the candlestick is a golden bowl containing oil that is supplied by the olive trees; and pipes or tubes or literally, “pourers,” lead from the bowl to seven lamps of the candlesticks. The idea is that the lamps are continuously supplied with oil from the bowl so that the fire of the candlesticks might never burn out. Without that oil the candlesticks could not burn, and without that oil they would give no light. The angel himself interprets this vision as the Holy Spirit being the oil that inexhaustibly flows into the seven lamps.

And Zechariah beholds on each side of the bowl two olive trees connected with the bowl. In this vision, then, there is a candlestick receiving oil from a bowl above it, which in turn receives its oil from two olive trees. The prophet asks of the angel, “What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?” (12).

The angel answers, “These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the LORD of the whole earth” (14).

These two anointed ones are also referenced in Revelation 11 as being the two witnesses; they are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks that stand before the Lord.

Who are the two anointed ones? The two anointed ones are the servants of God, who are officially called and ordained for the service of God. It is, first, a reference to true ministers of the word; and second, it is a reference to the church of Jesus Christ, which also serves the Lord. And putting all of this together, then, we have the meaning that it is the Holy Spirit who completes the kingdom

of God. It is the Holy Spirit who gives power to the preaching of the servant of God in the instituted church. And the Holy Spirit is the power who gives strength to the church made up of believers. The Holy Spirit is the oil that causes the believer to burn in his zeal for God. The Holy Spirit is the strength of the office of all believer.

Its Power

Because the office of all believer is a Spirit-filled office, it is an office of great power. When the church has abandoned the word of God and the rule of man is enthroned, then the believer has the right, calling, and ability to form the church anew, simply from the fact that the believer is anointed with the Spirit of Jesus Christ by faith.

But this original authority, common to all believers, again begins to function directly and without the guidance and authority of these office-bearers, in case these office-bearers become unfaithful to their charge and refuse to amend their neglect and errors.¹

New office-bearers may be elected by a Church, a body of believers, if at any time their present office-bearers become unfaithful and untrue.²

The significance here is that if the officebearers have corrupted themselves with the lie and the officebearers persist in that lie, then the office of all believer has the right and calling to depose those in the special offices and to elect new officebearers within the church itself, if possible. But as is usually the case in apostasy, the carnal element often claims the majority and casts off Jesus Christ, and reform from within is no longer possible. Then the office of all believer may and must reinstitute the church anew.

History proves this. From the corrupt institution of the Roman Catholic Church sprang the churches of the Reformation. From the corrupt state church of the Netherlands sprang the *Afscheiding* of 1834 and the *Doleantie* of 1886. From the corruption of the Reformed Church in America sprang the Christian Reformed Church. From the Christian Reformed Church arose the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1924 over the false doctrine of common grace. And from the corruption of the Protestant Reformed Churches, God formed the Reformed Protestant Churches in the year 2021 over the life-or-death issue of unconditional covenant fellowship. That is our controversy with the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). How do you experience the covenant, justification, and salvation? by labor and working? or by grace

alone? by obedience and good works? or by faith alone in the blood of Jesus Christ?

What gave all these churches the right to split off from the denominations to which they had belonged? The answer is the word of God, which the believer holds in his hand and whereby he judges all things in his office as prophet, priest, and king. No one may deny the believer this right.

In January 2021 when God formed the Reformed Protestant Churches, even if there was not one faithful office-bearer, believers in their offices of all believer could have joined together to reinstitute the church. They could have elected elders and deacons from among themselves. They could have invoked article 8 of the Church Order to call a man to the ministry who was especially endowed with the gifts of the Spirit to preach the gospel. And not one thing would have been taken away from this reformation.

The fact is that God, as a gift of grace to his church, did give to the Reformed Protestant Churches faithful office-bearers who could lead his people out from the bondage of Egypt and the doctrine of man's working in salvation, which displaced Christ as the perfect mediator. The fact that God gave faithful officebearers was utterly gracious and stands as powerful evidence that the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches was reformation and not schism.

Spirit-Less

The Holy Spirit is the bond between the Father and the Son, between God and Jesus Christ, between Christ and the church, and between the believer and Christ. If you are joined to the living God of heaven and earth, the God of the sacred scriptures, the God of the decree, and Jesus Christ; then you will love the truth, confess it, and defend it. And you will hate the enemies of God and the lie that strips God of all his sovereignty and fashions him as an idol god of man's imagination.

The current state of the Protestant Reformed Churches clearly reveals that she is Spirit-less. There is always a spirit present, but it is not the Spirit of Christ. There is no power of the Spirit there, and that is clearly evidenced in her preaching. A minister is a herald and an ambassador for Christ, who is commissioned to cry forth the good news of the free forgiveness of sins that is in Jesus Christ. For the Protestant Reformed minister today, where is that fire of the Holy Spirit? Where is the zeal for the name of God? Where is the love of Christ as he is revealed in sound doctrine? Christ is the way, *the truth*, and the life. But in the Protestant Reformed Churches, there is no Spirit, and there is no fire. Not only are most sermons full of false doctrine

1 Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary: A Brief Explanation of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), 164.

2 Van Dellen and Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary*, 134.

but they are also boring to listen to. Even if a minister might still preach true things, where is the condemnation of the lie? There is no righteous anger, no holy horror, over the fact that God's name is trampled on time and time again and that the sheep are being scattered by false doctrine. The task of the minister is to preach the truth of the word of God over against the errors within and without; his task as a shepherd is to protect the sheep. This does not happen by a group of shepherds meeting together and pondering over whether they saw a wolf within their flock or not. "These things take time," they say. No matter that the sheep are being torn apart. "We must make sure that we actually saw a wolf." But it looks like a wolf; it sounds like a wolf. "But the howl was a bit muffled," they say. "It was not a very clear howl. Perhaps he did not mean to howl like that. Or perhaps he is not a wolf after all. We will let him be for now." No, the shepherd protects his sheep and drives away the wolves and even lays down his life for the sheep.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are Spirit-less, and that is also evidenced by her membership, which to this day continues to be sound asleep. Hardly anything can stir the membership up at this point. Certainly not doctrine. But what can stir up the members? Mention a third-party investigation. The Protestant Reformed denomination feels a lot like the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in many ways. The CRC and PRC continue to fight against symptoms of their false doctrine. The CRC is fighting against homosexuals in office but has long ago forsaken the truths of marriage, the family, and the covenant. The PRC is fighting against systemic and institutional abuse but embraces the idol god of a conditional covenant theology. But both denominations should be fighting the false doctrine that is the root of their issues. Christ reigns in his church and rules in truth and equity. He is the righteous judge who rules by his word and Spirit. Where there is the lie, there is no rule of Christ. The PRC along with the CRC will never fix their problems. A third-party investigation will never solve a thing for the PRC, much like the CRC will never rid itself of homosexuality.

It is interesting to note that the Protestant Reformed theology of repentance and forgiveness is exactly the same as Christian Reformed theology.

Each one of us can enter that doorway to experience fully this promised joy of God. After all, Jesus promised that our repentance is a pathway to experiencing the good news in the here and now. So let us fully experience that promise by regularly repenting and forgiving one another.³

That is Protestant Reformed theology. The experience of the forgiveness of sins is in the way of man's repenting

or along the pathway of repentance. The PRC has no right anymore to a separate existence. They should, as did Reverend De Wolf and his churches, return back to the CRC. This is the trampling of God's name and the cross of Jesus Christ that causes the Spirit-filled church and Spirit-filled believer to rise up in holy horror.

The spirit that rules in the PRC is not the Spirit of Christ. That is evidenced by how the PRC is defining love too. It is not a love that reveals itself in hatred for sin and the lie, but it is a twisted version of love that is identical with what the world calls love. That love is not of the Spirit but of the devil. It is a fake love based on emotion, feeling, and toleration.

The Spirit of Christ is not neutral toward the truth or the lie. The Spirit is the bond of love in the triune God. Love is the consecration of the three persons in the Trinity. And those in Christ, who have that Spirit in them, burn as a blazing fire in love for God and his Christ and against all idolatry and idol worshipers, including against the believer's own flesh. Because the Spirit is not neutral, therefore neither is the believer neutral. The believer who has been united to Jesus Christ and anointed with his Spirit burns with zeal for the truth, and that truth bubbles up inside of him, causing him to confess the truth, to serve God, and to fight against sin.

The Reformed Protestant Churches are the true spiritual sons of Rev. Herman Hoeksema and Rev. George Ophoff. If those men were alive, they would be Reformed Protestant. I can be so bold, too, to say that if Noah or Abraham or David or the apostle Paul or John Calvin or Hendrik de Cock were alive, they too would all be Reformed Protestant. I can say that because they all confessed the same truth: the truth of the unconditional promise; the truth of unconditional covenant fellowship, apart from man and his working; and the truth of justification by faith alone and the free forgiveness of sins, which are the truths of the scriptures and of God. And that is the truth that is clearly sounded forth and confessed in the Reformed Protestant Churches today. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:5-6). All that is left for the PRC and every other false church is the judgment and wrath of God.

The office of all believer is not found outside the church of Jesus Christ. This doctrine is of no aid or comfort for the man or woman who decides that he or she does not need church membership in a church or who sits in the false church. That one abuses this doctrine and lives in disobedience and rebellion against God. It is in the true church where Christ speaks and creates and strengthens faith, of which faith the believer partakes of Christ's anointing and is equipped by the Spirit to fulfill

3 Rob Braun, "The Therapy of Repentance and Forgiveness," *Banner* 158, no. 11 (December 2023): 11.

his office. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and those who reject the truth are not of the Spirit.

And second, the office of all believer does not give a person the license to speak whatever he wants. It is the right and privilege of the child of God to speak the truth

of the sacred scriptures and that truth as it is systematized and laid out in our Reformed confessions.

Next time, the Lord willing, I will examine closely the office of all believer as that office is executed and carried out by the believer through the Spirit of Christ.

—TDO

RUNNING FOOTMEN

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

NOT IN MY CHURCH

Being that I have lived in the West my whole life, I have heard and myself have expressed, “Not in my church” or “That is a Classis-East problem.” That attitude was a cop-out that allowed me to keep on sleeping. That attitude and excuse pacified my conscience just well enough that it would leave me alone (at least until the next minister, professor, or perma-president of the theological school committee would break from the orthodoxy of our Reformed faith). And when heresy was preached by a minister in “my church,” using this same attitude, one would simply say, “Glad he is not my minister,” and move on his merry way. The congregation continued to sleep, content that the danger lay somewhere off in the distance, and ignored the heresy (that we recognized embarrassingly less than we should have) in between snores.

“Not in my church” is a phrase we would expect to hear from the pews of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), and this has been a weak but oft-repeated defense of the sleepy parishioner to stave off the rude and unwanted questions of the troublemaker brother. However, “not in my church” is not only being said in our mother church, but it has all too frequently become the defense of those who have left us after God drew us from the fowler’s snare.

This makes me pause. It strikes me that there is something here that goes deeper than spiritual sleepiness. Something that does not smell like a mere defensive mechanism, something that seems as though there is indeed more behind the mask than is evident. Those who left the Protestant Reformed Churches with us lost almost everything. They lost their names, their comforts, their friends, and their families. This phrase then is not merely the defense of a sleeping man; rather, this rebuttal

is now said with all the alertness of a warrior fresh from the field of battle.

Those who say, “I do not hear that heresy in my church” or “My minister does not say that” speak now from the pews of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church or the United Reformed Churches or even from back in the Protestant Reformed Churches. They had once left a denomination because she tolerated and promoted the lies of meritorious good works that earned God’s fellowship and one’s degree in heaven, available grace, conditional communion with the Father, and repentance as the means unto forgiveness. They left a denomination that defends the false teachers who preach such abominable heresies (even on the grounds of a man’s “sterling” reputation) and that refuses to exercise discipline on even one word of false doctrine but comes down harshly and swiftly on those who would dare preach the truth and call the denomination to repentance. They left that false doctrine; they said that they saw the lie for what it is, and they left the PRC for the sake of the next generation and for the health of their own starved souls. They had left the lie, only shockingly to return to it in a different and, in most cases, a more blatant version of it.

For all the doctrinal departure that the Protestant Reformed denomination has had in recent decades, it is not because she had a flawed foundation. The three forms of unity are not to blame for the PRC’s shameful fall. No, the PRC’s errors are well documented in her own synodical *Acts* and minutes of classes, and those errors have been brought to light on the pages of this publication. The denomination had the truth, and she left it. Now, there could possibly be someone who ignorantly believes his or her local church still holds to *only* the old paths of

the PRC, but if one has left the PRC because of the PRC's false doctrine, that same one cannot return to the PRC and try to hide behind the "not-in-my-church" excuse again. Nor can it be so for one who now willingly joins himself or herself to the United Reformed Churches, a denomination whose history claims the three points of common grace as her doctrine; or joins the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which has a covenant of works written right into its foundational confession¹—a heretical covenant that makes Christ the plan B and makes God fail to accomplish what he supposedly set forth to do in Adam.

How does such a one, having seen the Protestant Reformed doctrine for what it is, return to it? Why would anyone turn to churches that are mandated by their creeds to preach false doctrine? And how can anyone now say, "Not in my church"? This can only be done if one has thrown out the doctrine of corporate responsibility.

Corporate responsibility is that biblical teaching of Romans 12:4–5, 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, and Belgic Confession 28 that God saves his people as one body, a holy congregation; that there is no salvation apart from it; that we are members one of another; and, therefore, we share a relationship with one another and a responsibility to one another.

Here the deserters object, "But I can belong to the invisible church regardless of what my visible church affiliation might be." Or they will say, "It does not matter what my church believes; my heart is not in it. I do not hear false doctrine in the preaching; and even if I did, I do not believe it, and my church does not say that I have to believe it." Scripture, however, disagrees with this mindset and rebukes anyone who would harbor it. In 1 Corinthians 10:16–21, we read concerning the apostle's warning to the church that it is impossible to be members in the false church and not to partake in her sins. The apostle uses an analogy that the church knows well; he uses the Lord's supper.

16. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?
17. For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.
18. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?
19. What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?

20. But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.
21. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

Therefore, being members in churches that hold to false doctrine, those members become partakers in that false doctrine, entertain the lie, and have fellowship with devils.

And scripture speaks of corporate responsibility in the Old Testament in the object lesson of Achan. Scripture sets forth that the sins of the members are the sins of the whole body: "But the *children of Israel* committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan...of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing; and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel" (Josh. 7:1, emphasis added). And in verse 11 Jehovah said to Joshua, "Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff." All of the members of the congregation were accounted as partakers in the sin of one of the congregation's members. How much more then is the member a partaker in the sins of his or her denomination.

The deadly reality of scoffing at corporate responsibility is found in few places clearer than in the history of the ten tribes of Israel. When the ten tribes of Israel saw that Rehoboam would not give them what they had asked for, and the cost had become too great, they rejected the line of David and so rejected Jesus Christ himself (1 Kings 12:16). Did that mean all the Jews head for head of the ten tribes believed what their leaders had decided? No, of course not. The Levites moved to Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chron. 11:14), and we know of the godly man Naboth. But what would be the end of this apostate church? And what was God's word to the Israelites? Israel, upon forsaking God's anointed, immediately apostatized. Jeroboam would set up the golden calves and throw a feast, so that the Israelites would not go up to the temple in Jerusalem to worship. God sent his condemnation against Israel through a prophet; and though the altar was split, the ashes poured out, and though Jeroboam's arm would be dried up, yet Jeroboam would not turn from his evil ways. And then we read in 1 Kings 13:34, "And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, *even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth*" (emphasis added). Israel never

¹ "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." Westminster Confession of Faith 7.2, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 3:616–17.

would put this sin away, and that was God's judgment against the apostate church. God gave the Israelites over to their sin: "And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin" (14:16). If the Israelites had said, "We do not believe that in our tribe" or "That is just Jeroboam's sin," would that have saved them from God's judgment of the nation? No.

We read later of the only hope for salvation that the saints in Israel had during the time of Hezekiah, and it would not be found in the apostate church of Israel. God would call the people of the nation of Israel to repent, to humble themselves, and to come to Jerusalem, to where the temple was, to where the altar was, to where the sacrificial lamb was. Though some, by God's grace, would repent and leave the ten tribes, God hardened the heart of Israel, so that the people laughed the princes of Judah to scorn and mocked them. And in the end God destroyed and scattered the nation, so that it would nevermore be a nation but become absorbed into the world to wait with the Gentiles for the preaching of Christ.

This applies to the church in our current day. There is no salvation found in the doctrines of man; there is no hope in the lies or in the kingdoms of man. The only hope we have is the hope of free, unconditional, complete salvation in Christ alone, apart from any work of man. The impotent god of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, who desires that all men repent but is powerless to accomplish his desires, is not God at all. And those who join themselves to such churches can expect no other end than the end the ten tribes of Israel met. Our word to those who have left us, to those still in the PRC, and to those in any church that holds to the lie is the same as the angel's word in Revelation 18:4: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

Now, specifically to address those who have left the Reformed Protestant Churches and claim that they do not hear heresy in the church they now attend but even claim to hear the gospel week by week, I do not claim to know their hearts and why they really left, so we judge instead their statements, their words. They try to claim a unity with us in Christ, while acknowledging the glaring contradiction between the doctrine of their new church and the Reformed Protestant Churches. I think no one expresses this more plainly than the late, Christian Reformed professor, Theodore Plantinga, in his book *Contending for the Faith*, when he writes,

It is important to note that the basis for the unity that is then achieved is not a common set of opinions or views on doctrinal matters. Indeed, when Christians seek one another out, there may be

considerable difference between them with regard to doctrine. What holds such Christians together and makes it possible for them to feel one is that Christ has claimed them all for His own. The ultimate bond of unity is oneness in relation to Christ. Naturally, this is not to say that confessional unity cannot serve to strengthen Christian fellowship. The point is simply that Christ's claim on the believer takes priority. That's why fellowship is possible between Christians with markedly different convictions.²

Though this statement appears to lay hold of election into Christ as the basis of unity for believers, which is absolutely true, Dr. Plantinga makes one fatal assumption, one that contradicts the teaching of Amos 3:3: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Dr. Plantinga starts with man's confession; and when two men's confessions differ, he attempts to reach back into election to claim that both men belong to Christ, and so they can walk together despite "markedly different convictions."

John, however, instructs the church to take a different approach. John starts with election, with Christ, and with the doctrine of Christ: "The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth...For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever" (2 John 1–2). This is the basis for our unity, love, and fellowship: that we abide in one truth, and that truth abides in us. So then, what does the apostle say to do when one comes to us who does not confess that same truth, one who has "markedly different convictions" from the truth? John's answer is in verses 9–11:

9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.
10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:
11. For he that biddeth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds.

And this principle is repeated again by Paul in Galatians 1:6–9:

6. I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:
7. Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.
8. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

² Theodore Plantinga, *Contending for the Faith: Heresy and Apologetics*, (Jordan Station, Ont.: Paideia Press, 1984), 126.

9. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

The truth is not up for grabs, as though everyone can have his own truth. There is one truth, one doctrine, and one gospel. What Dr. Plantinga fails to see is that those whose confessions essentially differ really do believe in different Christs. If they cannot agree on *which* Christ is the real one, how can they claim to have unity in Christ? The Christ of Dr. Plantinga's Christian Reformed Church has a common grace for everyone, so I suppose he thinks this means that he can have unity with everyone. But the Christ of the scriptures and the Reformed creeds with particular sovereign grace for God's elect alone is a very different Christ. Many will say to Christ, "Lord, Lord," but there is only one Christ and not many.

What is also sadly discarded when one has disdained corporate responsibility in the church is the communion of saints. Since Christ, as our head, suffered and died to take away all the sins of his people, we are forever indebted to Christ. Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism states,

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

This duty to one another is an extension of the debt we owe to Christ, our head, and it is an inevitable fruit of the

Spirit in us. That love-debt that we owe to our head, we owe to Christ's body as well, for he is in us and we are in him. What a wonderful picture the Catechism paints: the members of the whole church readily and cheerfully employing their gifts for the advantage and salvation of one another, laying down one's life for the good of the body, building up one another and being built up. And when we sin, we have brothers and sisters who love us enough to admonish us and show us our sin. The communion of the saints gives us purpose beyond our own wants and pursuits; it broadens our perspective to include others; it gives us opportunities to praise and give thanks to God in our care for others. But this is lost too because as one rejects corporate responsibility, at that very same time he embraces independentism. This is because "not in my church" also means, "That is your problem." It means, "I think I can keep myself safe from the perceived danger by my own strength," while at the same time making it clear that "I do not intend to use any of my strength to help you."

Now, this does not apply only to those who have left us, but corporate responsibility is something we must all remember. It means that we must care about what is happening in our denomination; it means that we must be ready to encourage, teach, and admonish each other; to talk about the problems; to help in the schools; to help carry the weight. And we must do all of this not to earn anything but because salvation has already been purchased for us. We do these things not to get into the body but exactly *because* we have already been made members of the body, with Jesus Christ as our head.

—Todd Ferguson

INSIGHTS

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

ACCORDING AS HE HAS CHOSEN US

The following quotation is taken from a speech given by Rev. Herman Hoeksema on April 1, 1954.¹

I have a few quotations here of the Canons, which I will take time to read. In Canons 1.B.2 we

read of the subterfuge of the Arminians, according to which they like to distinguish election into two kinds of election—the one incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional and the

¹ Herman Hoeksema, "Our Present Controversy in the Light of the History of the Church," https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=the-history-of-1953. The excerpt from the speech is taken from minute 1:03:43 through 1:10:42.

other complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute. By this distinction they mean, of course, that God's election is of such a nature that we can ourselves determine whether or not we will be elect. Don't you see? God's election is conditional, is non-decisive, until we come and make it decisive by fulfilling the condition of faith, by fulfilling the condition of obedience, and by fulfilling the condition of perseverance? That's Arminianism.

All right. Oh, those that so love conditions, are so in love with conditions, because that's what they are. They are in love with conditions. They are not in love with the Protestant Reformed truth; they are in love with conditions. Those that are so in love with conditions, they say, "Oh, we do not believe in conditional election. Oh, no! Election is absolute; election is decisive; election is unconditional. We do not believe in that, but we believe that the *application* of election in our salvation is conditional." That's what they say. The *application* of it. "The application of election *in time*," they say, "is conditional." That's what they say.

But don't you see, beloved, that that is absolutely impossible? Don't you see that if the application of salvation to us is conditional in time, that the *order* of election in eternity must also be conditional? All things flow, as far as salvation is concerned, all things flow from the election of God. All things flow from the counsel of God, as to salvation. As it is in time, so it is in the counsel of God. As it is in the counsel of God, so it is in time. When you say that the counsel of God is unconditional, you say that the application of salvation is unconditional. That can never fail.

Why? Because scripture teaches in Ephesians 1:3 and 4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who [according to his abundant mercy] hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." *According as he has chosen us*, so he blesses us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. If he has chosen us conditionally, he blesses us conditionally. If he doesn't bless us conditionally, then he hasn't chosen us conditionally. And that is Reformed, beloved. That is Reformed, nothing else.

Unconditional election requires unconditional application of salvation—no conditions at all.

I could quote more, but I will take no time. There is much more in the same Canons. You have this in B.3 of the same chapter. You read of the error of the Remonstrants that God does not

choose certain persons; but rather, note, out of all possible conditions, he chose the act of faith as a condition of salvation.

Now, the opponents, those that departed from us, those that are no longer Protestant Reformed, those that do not want to be Protestant Reformed anymore—they don't want to. Don't ever say that they do. They don't! They don't. Those that say that they believe in unconditional election, they will condemn this error of the Arminians, and they will say, "No, we don't believe that! We don't believe that God chose out of all possible conditions the act of faith as a condition unto salvation."

Yet, beloved, again I will say that if faith is the condition in time, it is a condition in election. It can never fail. If faith is *presented* as a condition, which we must fulfill, of course, in time, then, of course, faith is a condition in election. If faith does not exist as a condition in election, it cannot exist as a condition in time. That's impossible. *According as he has chosen us*, so he blesses us with all the blessings of salvation in heavenly places in Christ. That's the truth.

When this speech was given in April 1954, the Protestant Reformed Churches recently had gone through a massive split, in which over two-thirds of the denomination left to join with those who wanted to maintain conditions in the preaching of the gospel. A former minister in First Protestant Reformed Church, Rev. Hubert De Wolf, by his own words, was not so concerned with the word *condition*, but he was concerned about the *idea of this term as it applied to man's responsibility*. Herman Hoeksema in this speech was showing that the preaching of conditions and prerequisites for salvation *in any form* is a denial of election.

During his Formula of Subscription examination in 1953, Reverend De Wolf voiced his displeasure when the consistory of First Protestant Reformed Church asked him questions regarding election as it is taught in the first head of the Canons of Dordt. Reverend De Wolf asked,

Mr. Chairman, would you give me your judgment of number 3 [referring to section 3 of his examination, "As to unconditional election"]—the whole number 3? Is it correct that the consistory also suspects me of believing in *conditional election*? Is that correct? The consistory accepted these questions, but is that true that I am suspected of believing in *conditional election*? I wasn't aware of that fact, and yet I am being questioned. I can answer these questions if you want me to, but it seems to me that it certainly isn't apropos. I wasn't aware of the fact that I was being suspected

of that. Of course, the consistory hasn't anything in the minutes whereof I am suspected.²

Reverend De Wolf's questions about and comments regarding section 3 of his examination, which examination questions had been sent in advance to all of the consistory members, including Reverend De Wolf, are curious to say the least.

As the fathers at the Synod of Dordt did when they started with the article in the Canons proclaiming sovereign predestination in their refutation of Arminian doctrine, so the consistory of First church worked through the theology of conditions to its logical conclusion. Conditional blessings—by grace, of course—is conditional election.

Hoeksema in the above speech explained Ephesians 1:3–4 by showing irrefutably that what happens in time or in the application of salvation is worked *in the same manner* as election in the counsel of God—without regard to a man's work! Further explaining, Hoeksema quoted Canons 1, rejection of error 3 to further show that a condition in time is a condition in eternity or in election. Dordt had declared,

For these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, do in no wise acknowledge the most important *fruit* or benefit thereby gained, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error.” (Canons of Dordt 2, rejection 3, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 165, emphasis added)

Ephesians 1:4 is quoted in Canons 1.7 and again in Canons 1.9, which I quote:

Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its *fruits and effects*, according to that of the apostle: *He hath chosen us* (not because we were, but) *that we should be holy and without blame before him in love* (Eph. 1:4). (*Confessions and Church Order*, 157, emphasis added)

Notice that the quoted parenthetical statement, “not because we were,” means also in respect to salvation and the blessings of salvation that God saves and blesses us not because we are holy, not because we will be holy, and not because we work holiness; but God chooses and blesses his people “without any respect to their works” (Belgic Confession 16, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 41).

Ephesians 1:4 is also quoted in Canons 1, rejection of errors 1 and 5, exclaiming the unconditional grace of God in election irrespective of a man's works and rejecting conditional blessings and foreseen conditions for salvation.

I could add to this, with respect to our recent controversy with the Protestant Reformed doctrine of conditional experience in the covenant of grace, then, that we reject the error of those

who teach that there is in this life no fruit and no consciousness of the unchangeable election to glory, nor any certainty, *except that which depends* on a changeable and uncertain condition.

Rejection: For not only is it absurd to speak of an uncertain certainty, but also contrary to the experience of the saints, who by virtue of the consciousness of their election rejoice with the apostle and praise this favor of God (Eph. 1). (Canons 1, rejection of error 7, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 161–62, emphasis added)

Also Canons 1.7:

God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy and for the praise of His glorious grace; as it is written: *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.* (*Confessions and Church Order*, 156)

Just to be clear, this refutation of conditional covenant experience, which is conditional covenant theology, is exactly what the pages of *Sword and Shield* have been demonstrating regarding the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches and her sister churches, which proclaim, to give a few examples, that a man must repent in order to receive the forgiveness of sins, that there is grace that is available by prayer, that in a certain sense man is first, that there are two rails side by side—God's sovereignty and man's responsibility—and even that faith is a condition because it is necessary.

Let us take heed that we rejoice in our lives of thankfulness as fruits of election and not mistake them to be lives to receive miserable, conditional blessings, for which our flesh is so easily tempted.

The whole speech is well worth listening to and can be found by scanning the QR code below.

—Jeremy Langerak



² Transcript of Reverend De Wolf's Formula of Subscription exam, given by Rev. C. Hanko, in *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 17 (April 2022), 17.

THE BEATITUDES (3): THE BLESSED MEEK

Introduction

Continuing in our series on the beatitudes, we arrive at the third beatitude, which reads this way: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). At the onset it is important to be reminded of what exactly a beatitude is. Many seemingly well-intentioned Reformed theologians wrangle this passage by losing sight of the form it takes. For many the form of a beatitude is simply an encouragement to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek, etc., etc. Others view the beatitudes as a list of spiritual virtues and dispositions, which when a man strives to do them, then God blesses him. However, that is not what a beatitude is. The word *beatitude* is like the word *Trinity* in the sense that it is found nowhere in our English Bibles, but *beatitude* is a derivative of the Latin word *beatitudo*, which literally means *supreme happiness* or *blessedness*. While *beatitude* does not appear in our English Bibles, the word does appear quite frequently in the Latin Vulgate. For example, in Romans 4:6 the psalmist is said to pronounce the “beatitude” of the man unto whom the Lord does not impute sin.

Originally in the word *beatitude*, there was meant much more than an abstract term denoting man’s blessedness. Additionally, the term was meant to refer to a declaration of blessedness. Being used interchangeably with the word *blessed* or *happy*, the word *beatitude* strikes upon what is the very essence of the blessing of God. What does it mean that God blesses someone? For God to bless someone means for God to eternally love someone, to appoint that one to salvation, and to give unto that one every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. The blessing of God is first salvation and all its benefits. That blessing reaches down unto men from the God of heaven, who is supremely blessed in his own triune being. When God blesses someone, God does so by calling that one. Literally, to bless means *to speak a good word upon someone*. When God blesses his people, that blessing is the expression of his eternal delight in them. Eternally, God spoke blessing toward his people in Jesus Christ according as God delighted in them. Throughout the entire Old Testament, God spoke blessing unto his elect Israel. And in the beatitudes we see the Lord Jesus blessing his disciples and in them blessing the entire New Testament church.

These blessings of Jesus Christ are not mere statements of fact, so that they are dull of any salvific meaning for the church. Neither are these beatitudes meant to inspire zeal in the church and to encourage the church to pattern herself after them. Rather, these beatitudes are pronouncements of blessing upon the citizens of the kingdom. While the beatitudes are certainly statements of fact, they are such as authoritative declarations. They are promises from the Lord that such will be the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Thus we read in Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek.” Notice, the text does not say, “The meek shall be blessed.” This is important to note because preachers may—and many do—look at a passage like this and then speak many great, glowing things about meekness, possibly to the extent of making an entire point of how meekness expresses itself, and then these preachers will make the blessing of God that which accompanies meekness. However, this is not how the text reads. The promise of the text is not a promise to bless merely those who exhibit meekness now, but the text is a declaration of blessing concerning those who are meek.

What explains this? They are blessed. The meek God has chosen. The meek are not blessed, who are first blessed in this life in their own consciences and experiences. On their behalf God sent Jesus Christ into the world to die on the cross for their sins, opening a wide entrance for them into the everlasting kingdom of heaven through his perfect work and righteousness. Unto them God sends the gospel and calls them unto himself, working faith in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and causing them to stand before his presence where he justifies them in their own consciences and experiences. Being children and heirs of the promise of God in Jesus Christ, Christ exercises his gracious rule in his church and works meekness in the hearts of his people by his word and Spirit. The meek have been, are now, and shall be forever blessed. This passage is the good news of the gospel and is blessed comfort for the church.

The Identity of the Meek

The Lord Jesus does not leave his church without a definition of meekness; he has given us the definition of meekness through his servant David in Psalm 37. In the psalm we read of the blessedness of the meek, that

they shall inherit the earth. And how shall the meek be known? “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity...Trust in the LORD...Delight thyself also in the LORD...Commit thy way unto the LORD...Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him” (1–7). The meek rest in Jehovah and wait patiently for him. The meek consider the Lord Jehovah, and upon considering Jehovah they also rest in him.

The meek rest in Jehovah. That is the most basic thing that you can say about the meek. They rest in Jehovah because they have been made to consider him. That is what the proud will never do. The proud will never consider Jehovah. The proud have no need of Jehovah. God is not in all their thoughts. The proud are haughty; they are as the Pharisees, who were filled with such a degree of self-importance that they sought after the best seats in the synagogues and broadened the hems of their garments as they passed through the city streets.

Not so for the meek. We must say about the meek that they are also those who are poor in spirit. Unto them God has reached down and, by a wonderwork of grace, has caused them to stand before his presence and to know the greatness of their debt with God and how nothing they are in themselves. The meek see Jehovah, who has all holiness and righteousness, and the meek declare about themselves that they have no holiness or righteousness of themselves. Considering Jehovah, the meek also mourn over their sins. Sin battles hard against the meek, so that day after day they come unto God with heaviness of heart and disquietness of spirit. Sin is egregious to them and a cause for continual sorrow. Considering Jehovah, the meek disparage themselves and are left utterly hopeless in themselves to pay off the massive debt of their sins to such a God.

Never considering Jehovah, the proud are those who suppose that they have some holiness or righteousness in themselves. The proud are not nothing in their own eyes, but they suppose that they have something to contribute to their salvation and to their blessedness. Sin is not very serious, and they have something to offer God. They do not mourn over their sins, but they glory in their unrighteousness. They freely sin without any consideration of the God before whom they must give an account.

However, the meek consider Jehovah. Considering Jehovah, the meek rest in him. The meek consider Jehovah as the God of all holiness and righteousness, and they consider themselves also in relationship to Jehovah, and they come to this conclusion: “Whereas I am a sinner and have no righteousness or holiness, my only source of comfort is in God.” The meek find rest in Jehovah God. Comforting themselves in Jehovah God, the meek also wait patiently for him. The meek have no reason to doubt or fear whatever may befall them because their salvation

is entirely wrapped up in Jehovah God. The meek wait upon Jehovah in submission to his will, which alone is good. This patient waiting on Jehovah is the patient waiting of faith. Faith alone expresses itself in patient endurance. Patience is the fruit of knowing Jehovah in his favorable disposition toward a man or woman and resting in that God.

Here we see how utterly antithetical the meek are to the Arminian. The thing about the Arminian is not that he never uses the name Jesus. However, the Arminian will go on and say, “Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone without any works, *but I must still believe!*” The Arminian has faith in his faith. The root of that wicked false doctrine is pride. That pride is such that it does not consider God to humble oneself before him. Such is the charge against every form of conditional theology that rears its head in the church, for conditional theology in all its forms has its source in pride. The pride of man attempts to remove God from his throne and to enthrone man and his willing and working in the place of God. Such has been the pride of man since the fall of Adam and Eve in paradise, and such shall be the pride of man even unto the end, when antichrist will arise and will oppose and exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, so that he as God will sit in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

There is no greater example of meekness than the Lord Jesus himself. Consider the Lord, who, when the shadow of the cross loomed over him and pressed out of him the bloody sweat in the garden, said, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). There is meekness on vivid display. The Lord Jesus possessed such a will that could never not be in harmony with the will of his Father in heaven. In submission to the will of the Father, Jesus suffered himself to be taken captive, unjustly tried, and innocently condemned to death by men. The Lord Jesus willingly submitted himself to the bitter and shameful death on the cross, upon which he bore the penalty for sins that were not his own.

There is meekness. Considering Jehovah, the Lord Jesus waited patiently upon Jehovah until Jesus should receive the reward of righteousness, which reward he had merited and thus established righteousness for all of God’s elect people. Jesus Christ firmly believed the promises of God toward him, that God should establish the throne of David forever, that God would set Jesus as king upon the holy hill of Zion, and that the rights and powers to execute judgment upon the nations should be committed into Jesus’ hands. All these things would come by means of the humiliation of Jesus Christ, in which he willingly suffered, considering his own will subservient to the will of his Father in heaven. Christ

suffered himself to be defrauded to the end that he might accomplish salvation.

For all that meekness is, it is to be lowly. Did not Christ himself say that he was meek and “lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29)? So laden with the burden of our sins, Christ was brought low with grief, so that he was unable to rise. Zion’s king did not stride into Jerusalem with all the pomp and circumstance that one might expect to see from an earthly king, but Jesus Christ came meek and lowly, riding upon the colt of an ass. At the cross we behold Christ in all his lowliness, suffering himself to be humiliated, stripped of all human dignity and of his very name and place in this world, in order to be hung bare upon the tree of the cross. And it was at the cross that Jesus Christ became the greatest of all sinners because it was there upon the cross that he bore the guilt and the shame of all the sins of God’s elect people. There Christ was forsaken in order that we might never be forsaken of God.

Possessing the spirit of meekness, Jesus Christ pours out his life-giving Spirit upon his church, so that he makes them meek. The citizens of the kingdom are meek, and that meekness is a characteristic of their lives as those lives are blessed by God through Jesus Christ. If there is one thing that you could say about the meek, it is that they are lowly. For they have been given the mind of Christ. The meek are not those who lack self-awareness. Rather, the meek have been caused to consider Jehovah. They also are poor in spirit and mourn over their sins. Accordingly, the meek have a very keen sense of who they are by nature and by very deed. They confess openly to God that they are nothing and, indeed, are the chief of sinners. The meek man considers himself in relationship to his neighbor and says, “Although he is a sinner, I am an even bigger one.” For the meek there are no greater sinners than themselves. For this cause the meek do not glory in their sins, but they glory in the grace and mercy of Jehovah God, apart from which they are wholly miserable and without any hope.

Finally, in considering the meek, we also must note about them that they would suffer the loss of all things for the sake of the honor and name of God, for the meek consider Jehovah! Great pride and selfishness are revealed in man when he allows the name of God to be dishonored. It is a manifestation of great pride to suffer the truth of God to be blasphemed. Not so for the meek. The meek would that the whole world revolt against them in protest rather than the truth of God be corrupted. We must never forget meek Moses, who, when he was coming down from the holy mount and was faced with the sinful idolatry of the people of Israel, threw down the tables of stone, so that they were dashed into pieces, and then proceeded to call upon the men of Israel to put their swords at their sides and to slay every man his brother (Ex. 32:27).

Where are the meek in the church world today? It is often written off as love to overlook sin in the church and to keep one’s opinions on doctrine to oneself. Post-modernism, which claims that every individual can have his own truth and that no one person’s truth has any more of a right to be true than another person’s truth, is not meekness. The spirit of meekness is not the same spirit that is embarrassed by the truth and fears that the confession of the truth would come across as arrogant. Surely, those who speak thus possess a spirit, but it is not the Spirit of Christ. Instead, they are under the controlling power of the devil. So soon as the church refuses to engage in doctrinal controversy over the truth, then one can be certain that the devil has entered.

Indeed, it is on account of the confession of the truth over against all lies that the meek are persecuted, being called all sorts of evil things and charged with the most heinous of crimes, for God’s sake. For man is proud over against the meek, and as a ravenous wolf, he devours those who appear to be sheep. That is not first indicative of a lack of meekness in relationship to other men, but it is indicative of a lack of meekness in relationship to God, for man by nature is proud and will not be made nothing before God. Man will never humble himself before the living God. Man by nature will never submit to the will of God. This also is true of the regenerated child of God by nature. How often do we not esteem ourselves and our own wills above the will of God? How often do we not trust ourselves? Failing to consider Jehovah, we do not rest in him as we ought. Therefore, it is so soon as we hear this blessing of God upon the meek that we must pray unto God to forgive all our sinful pride.

The Cause of Their Meekness

The meek are blessed who have been given to walk in that spiritual virtue. The meek are blessed who find meekness completely foreign to themselves by nature, for that blessing comes to them according as they are made the citizens of the kingdom. Those whom God has called out of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son, them God also blesses with meekness. God, who reaches down from heaven in his gracious rule, making the meek poor in spirit and causing them to mourn over their sins, also dashes into pieces their pride by the operation of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. Whereas before their own wills sat enthroned in their hearts, now the Lord Jesus Christ takes his rightful place. By the operation of the word and Spirit, the Lord Jesus causes them to stand before the presence of God and to confess their own nothingness and unworthiness.

There is a special place given to the preaching of the gospel in the beatitudes, concerning which gospel

the sacraments are signs and seals. God uses means to strengthen within his people that spiritual virtue whereby a man or woman is made meek. It is only by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ that the meek find the forgiveness of their sins and everlasting righteousness on account of which they can never be condemned. For this reason the meek are utterly dissatisfied with anything other than Jesus Christ and him crucified. Ultimately, the meek cannot sit contentedly underneath any form of preaching that conditions salvation or their experience of salvation upon themselves and their works.

The meek rise in holy horror when men declare unto them that they must keep the law for their blessedness. The meek are repulsed when men declare unto them that Jesus Christ invites them to sing with him and only when they do that can they be assured that their songs of praise are heard by the Father. All these things are anathema to the meek. Instead, the meek glory alone in the cross of Jesus Christ. The meek cleave tenaciously to that cross by faith because God himself has arrested them in their sins and has caused them to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. Then and only then can one be assured that the kingdom of heaven has come.

The kingdom of heaven comes and possesses the meek. The kingdom does not come through the dramatic depictions of the life and sufferings of Christ in the theaters. The kingdom does not come through the gradual Christianization of this present evil world. The kingdom does not come by any of these means, for the kingdom of God is a heavenly kingdom. How, then, can someone tell that the kingdom of heaven has come? The kingdom of heaven has come when a man, who by nature is proud and does not consider God, is broken in his heart, confesses his own nothingness before God, and seeks for righteousness outside of himself in Jesus Christ.

Their Blessedness

The blessedness of the meek is a crown of grace unto the meek. That meekness is itself a gift of grace from the king of the kingdom of heaven. In grace the king of the kingdom crowns that gift. Being already blessed, unto whom the kingdom of heaven has come, the meek are also promised the earth. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." This is the message that stands antithetically over against the whole world, which rages against the meek and makes inheriting the earth the result of the strength of man, whether that be of a man's physical abilities or his intellectual abilities. Over against that view stands the word of the beatitude.

The most important aspect of this blessedness of the meek is not so much what they receive but how they receive it. Lacking any real consideration of God, the proud say, "By my own strength and by my own arm of flesh, I shall inherit the earth." But the meek know differently. Considering Jehovah, they rest in him and confess, "God shall give me the earth." In what other way would it be possible for the meek to suffer the loss of all things, except that they know the promise of God that he shall give them the earth? The meek can and do suffer the loss of all things because they know that what God has promised he is also able to perform.

May we, then, do what so many have already done and relegate that word "shall" strictly to the future, so that there is no blessing for the meek now in this life? Let the reader always be on guard against those who relegate their blessedness strictly to the future. Oftentimes, those who speak thus do so to make any conscious experience of blessedness on this side of the grave in some way dependent upon man's works, however those works may be defined.

The blessedness of the meek may not be taken to refer strictly to the future. Surely the meek shall inherit the earth in the absolute future. When heaven and earth shall pass away, then shall they inherit the earth, as that earth is entirely taken up in the heavenly and all things are made new in Jesus Christ. However, that is not merely what Matthew 5:5 refers to. The key to understanding the blessedness of the meek is found for us in Psalm 37:11: "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." The proud man never truly experiences peace, no matter how great his reputation or his riches. But the meek shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

God gives to the meek an earnest of that inheritance that is theirs by his Spirit. By the operation of the Spirit, the meek are cleansed from the guilt of their sins and are incorporated by faith into Jesus Christ, so that they are righteous in him by faith only. By the Spirit the meek have peace with God by faith in Jesus Christ. By the Spirit the meek live in the earth and enjoy the fruits of the earth, as God is pleased to give them, with a clean and a quiet conscience, such that they can never be condemned. The meek may patiently endure the loss of all things because they have been given an earnest of their inheritance by the Spirit, who is given unto them. The meek are content with whatsoever the Lord is pleased to give them because this world is not their home, for the citizenship of the meek is in heaven.

—Garrett Varner



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way,
and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. — Exodus 23:20*

Mysterious figure is this angel. He is an angel and yet not an angel. He visited Babel and wrecked it. He talked with Abraham. He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and all the cities of the plain and saved righteous Lot. He stood at the top of the ladder between earth and heaven and spoke with Jacob, and later the angel wrestled with Jacob all night. The angel walked through Egypt and passed by the houses with blood on the doorposts and entered in at every unmarked door in order to slay all the firstborn of Egypt. The angel appeared to Moses in the mount and gave him the law. The angel wrote the law with his finger! Later the angel came to Joshua as captain of Jehovah's host. The angel fought for Israel and gave the nation the land of Canaan. He dwelt in the temple and received the sacrifices, burnt offerings, and incense. He arose from off this throne in the days of Hezekiah, so that the might of the Gentile, unsmitten by the sword, melted like snow in the glance of the Lord. The angel appeared in the visions of the prophets. He is an angel and yet not an angel. He is God. He is God who revealed himself to his people and spoke with them in the Old Testament in the form of an angel. God's name is in the angel, so that he is the full and complete revelation of God, and in him God comes to his people.

And this angel, who was always at the center of all God's dealings with his people in the Old Testament, God also promised to send before his people. They had just come out of Egypt. This angel had delivered them and had destroyed all the hosts of Egypt. When Pharaoh hardened his heart and pursued the people in order to bring them back into Egypt, then this angel in the cloud of his glory was Israel's reward, and this angel took off the wheels of Pharaoh's chariots and mired the feet of his men in the bottom of the Red Sea. At the command of this angel, the waves of the sea drowned Pharaoh and his host, and their dead bodies were seen by Israel on the shore. The angel brought the Israelites to Mount Sinai. There he descended on the mountain, which trembled and quaked so much that Moses said that he feared greatly. And there the angel gave the Israelites God's law in order to organize them as God's covenant people.

But many miles and many years and many experiences and much trouble and affliction lay between Sinai and the promised Canaan. Would God leave his people to find their own way? God would send his angel before them! God would keep the Israelites in the way in order with infallible wisdom and power to bring them to their promised land.

And so this angel does for us. In the fullness of time, he cast off the form of an angel, and he took the flesh and the blood of children. He was made man, and he went to the cross to deliver his people from the Egypt of their sins and their cruel Pharaoh, the devil. He is Jesus!

And will he leave us now? Are we to make our own way to the promised Canaan of heaven? God will send his angel before us to keep us in the way and to bring us infallibly to our promised land.

What did Jesus say when he went away before us to heaven? "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly. Amen.

—NJL