

A stylized illustration in shades of orange and white. It depicts a hand holding a sword, with a shield positioned in front of it. The shield features a circular design with several smaller circles inside. The background is white, and the overall style is clean and modern.

# 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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Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

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Every writer is solely responsible for the content of his own writing.

Signed letters and submissions of general interest may be sent to the editor in chief at [natelangerak@att.net](mailto:natelangerak@att.net) or to

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

705 Pettibone St

Crown Point, IN 46307

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Reformed Believers Publishing

325 84th St SW, Suite 102

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## LOVE NOT THE WORLD

*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. — 1 John 2:15–17*

**T**his text is almost entirely negative. Do not love the world or the things in the world. Do not love the world or the things in the world because they are not of God. The world passes away. There is a set time when this world and everything in it will be no more. And then we must ask, if this world and everything in it pass away, will there then be nothing but God again? There was a time, if we may speak so foolishly, when only God was. In the beginning already the Word was, and the Word was with God. God alone is eternal.

And where was the world then? The world was in God's counsel. His counsel was with him as he determined and planned all things in eternity. God not only beheld all things before they occurred, but he also beheld all things as perfect in him. He beheld the world as it was made and as it passed from perfection to sin and the curse. God beheld the world as it passed from creation to the flood to Jesus Christ. God beheld Christ's incarnation, cross, and resurrection as standing at the very center of God's plan. God beheld as the world passed from Golgotha to the coming of Christ to judge the quick and the dead. God beheld the world as he rolled back the heavens as a scroll and burned the world with unquenchable fire; as he overthrew sin, death, hell, and the grave; and as he cast all the wicked out of the world into hell. God beheld as he recreated a new heaven and a new earth united in one in Jesus Christ, a world recreated after the pattern of the heavenly to be the everlasting home of his chosen people, in which they live and reign with Christ for the endlessly turning calendar of the everlasting age of perfection. And God beheld the everlasting age from eternity as one indivisible present. All things, all events, and all movements and progression in time and space, God beheld as but a blink before his eternal eyes. All things were before him, and all things were perfect before him—the perfect plan for the revelation of himself as the covenant God, by establishing a covenant of grace and reconciliation with his elect people in Christ Jesus, their head and savior! God beheld the world as the stage!

The text is almost entirely negative, but the standpoint of the text is the positive purpose of God for the everlasting salvation of his people and the whole cosmos made perfect in his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the viewpoint of the text because the apostle says, "He that doeth the will of God abideth forever!" There is a heavenly reality standing behind the text. It is an abiding reality that is developing and being made plain in the world. That reality is God's eternal kingdom in Jesus Christ—the eternal kingdom that develops and is unfolded on the world stage. Because of the coming of this kingdom, the world perishes. And for the existence of this kingdom, this present world and everything in it must give way at last and be destroyed.

You belong to that abiding heavenly reality! You are not of the world. You are of the Father, and he who does the will of the Father abides forever. The everlasting age that is coming broke into this world with the announcement of the coming of Christ, in the incarnation, and in the crucifixion of Christ in the world. And the everlasting age has come to you, has laid hold on you, and has translated you out of the world into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Love not the world! Love God! The things in the world are not of God! You are of God! Love not the things that are not of God! Those things perish, but you abide forever!

When the apostle says, "Love not the world," he uses the word "world" in a comprehensive sense.

The word *world* has different meanings in scripture. Most basically the word means an organized and harmonious whole.

One meaning of *world* is this present cosmos as it was created by God and as it is destined to be the eternal dwelling place of Christ and his elect church made perfect. Christ is the head of the cosmos. The members of the elect church are its prophets, priests, and kings. The created world will be united in one in Jesus Christ, and cast out of the new world forever will be all the wicked. God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

God does not love all men. He loves some and appoints them to everlasting life. God hates others and appoints them to everlasting condemnation. God loves his world that he created and destined to be perfected in Christ along the deep, dark, and mysterious way of sin and grace; death and resurrection; election and reprobation; and turning and hardening for the glory of his holy name as the only good God. Yes, God has an eternal purpose for the world, a grand and glorious purpose, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered the heart of man to conceive the things that God has prepared for those who love him and are the called according to his purpose.

God originally made the world a harmonious whole. When he made the world, there was no sin in it. When God surveyed the world on the first Saturday as he rested from all the works that he had made, then he pronounced the world to be *very good!* Understand that the words *very good* were not the pronouncement merely that the world was without sin. Surely the world was without sin. God made no devils, only angels. God made no sinful men, but he made a perfect man—Adam and his wife, Eve—able in all things to will agreeably to the will of God. God made all things good, each thing standing in its proper place and relationship to all other things. You must also understand that God said that the world was very good because every creature, no matter how small and insignificant, was the embodiment of the Wisdom of God, who had made them, and those creatures spoke the name of God. The whole creation shouted the glory of God. The whole creation shouted the glory of God as created by the Word. And man in the creation was created to love and to serve God his creator and to consecrate everything in creation to the glory of God.

But the creation and everything in it did not shout the glory of God in the highest sense as redeemed by the Word made flesh. The creation was good, very good, yet it was not the highest good. God made the world and pronounced it to be very good because it was exactly as he had determined it to be as the stage for the revelation of the wonder of grace! So there was rebellion in heaven and rebellion on earth as Satan and man turned against God, who was their creator. Man allied himself with the devil, who was God's enemy. This did not happen outside God's sovereign control but according to his eternal purpose that the world be the stage for the revelation of himself and his glory—the glory of his grace and justice, his omnipotence and sovereignty, his salvation and damnation, and his covenant of grace—that in all things and with all things, he would be praised, worshiped, served, and glorified as the only God. Yes, the creation was set to unfold the eternal purpose of God!

Thus when the text speaks of “world,” you must understand that comprehensively.

The meaning of “world” is, first, the creation as you know it—the creation as it was originally good, as it came under the curse in Adam, and as it now groans and travails under that curse. Love not this world as you know it. Oh, even in its fallen state, there are beauty and attraction to the world: its light and life; its brilliant sunlight and soft, silvery moonlight; its twinkling hosts in heaven; its mountains and valleys; its gurgling streams and roaring rivers; its broad, deep, and powerful oceans; the placid lakes and beautiful beaches; the vast forests and sweeping grasslands; all the birds, flowers, and multitude of animals and fishes; and the treasures of gold, silver, and precious stones mined from the earth. In wisdom God made them all!

Love not the world! Do not set your affections on things here below and on this form of the creation!

Second, the apostle means by “world” the coalition of the ungodly who occupy this world. The world is the world of sinful flesh; it is the world of the ungodly; it is the world of the apostate. It is the world as it is controlled and directed under the power of the prince of this world, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience. They are united together, and they exist in the world in hostility to God. The apostle says that the world is full of lusts. Lust is covetousness. Covetousness is as idolatry and witchcraft, the very antithesis of God!

The heart of the world is full of that covetousness. In that heart man exists in hatred and hostility to the Father. The love of the Father is not in that heart at all. Covetousness is a corruption of the heart, such that man takes the world and seeks himself. God made all things to serve himself. And man in his covetousness takes all the things in the world and seeks himself, his pleasure, his glory, and his name. And covetousness, like witchcraft, casts its spell over the whole life of man, and he lives then in his lusts and in hatred and opposition to God.

Love not the world! The world is the enemy of your Father in heaven!

Then man, as he lives in the world in his lusts, fills the world with the fruits of his covetousness. The things in the world, the Spirit says, are *the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life!*

The lusts of the flesh are all the things with which man fills the world to satisfy his carnal desires. The lusts of the flesh are the baser desires of man. He takes all his food and drink, and he does not eat unto God but unto himself, so that he satisfies his flesh and its need to be healthy. But man is healthy unto himself. It is a godless kind of eating. He takes his food and drink, and he satisfies his flesh with gluttony and drunkenness and revelry. He takes the good gift of sex, and he satisfies his flesh with lewdness and fornication and adultery. The lusts of the flesh are the bar and the brothel; the upscale, fine-dining restaurant and the exquisite, gourmet dinner; and man's

sensual clothes, opulent houses, and expensive cars. And if man cannot have the finest, then he seeks to satisfy his desires with whatever he can afford.

The lusts of the eyes are the more refined lusts of man—his artistry and philosophy, his science and medicine, and his prose and poetry. Here man seeks himself and his glory. The lusts of the eyes are the theater, the music festival, the laboratory, the hospital, and the university. The lusts of the eyes are all man's songs and dances, his vain literature and godless philosophy. The lusts of the eyes are all his wicked, false doctrine and false religion. In all of it man seeks himself and his glory; and in all of it, he exists in the creation and with the creation for the satisfaction of himself and for his own glory. Man speaks about and works to establish a heaven on earth that is not only apart from God but is also hostile to God and excludes God. Man would cast God out of God's own creation.

And the pride of life stands behind all man's lusts. With the pride of life, man stands boldly in the world that God made and as man is confronted by God in all creation, and man denies God. All sin, all lust, is ultimately the denial of God. Denying God, man seeks to maintain himself in his godless existence in a perishing creation. Yes, man glories in the purely earthly life. He seeks his own honor and glory and not God's. Pride is the devil's sin. And the poison of that pride the devil instilled in man from the beginning. The end of this pride will be when wicked man shall sit in the temple of God and announce himself before the world to be God, to whom the great red dragon will give his seat, power, and authority!

Love not the world or the things in the world!

Do not set your affections on this world as it now stands and moves along in its history.

Do not seek your own glory along with the world.

Do not make the world your friend.

Do not let your flesh reign, so that your eyes are turned to the world's glittering sights and your ears are tuned to the world's siren song and the world casts its spell over you and you turn your eyes from heaven and your ears from the word of God. Do not revel in the world's pleasures and seek happiness in the world's unrighteousness. Do not give yourselves to the world's pleasures and lusts. Do not seek this world and its goods.

Love not the world!

For all that is in the world is not of God.

Not that God did not create the world! The world and all that it contains are God's. The world's wealth, secrets, and powers are of God.

All that man develops of the world in his lusts is not of God. All that the world uses to seek its own glory and good is not of God. The things that constitute the world's existence, for which the world lives, and by which the

world shows its hatred of God, are not of God but are of the world.

All the things of the world are not of God. God did not command these things. He does not love these things. He despises them and damns them. He has nothing to do with the darkness. He hates the darkness; for he is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

These things are out of the world. The world devised these things with its wicked and depraved imagination and in deliberate opposition to God and his will. Those of the world use these things in their covetousness for the satisfaction of their own lusts. The world's life and experiences, entertainment and recreation, business and industry, art and culture, education and philosophy, and religion and doctrine are not of God.

And the world's hopes and dreams—the world also hopes and dreams—are not of God. The world's hopes and dreams are of a heaven on earth—an earthly paradise. The world dreams of one united world government where the peace and wisdom of man reign and in which there is no God, no Christ, and no church that lives in antithetical separation from the world of sin and darkness. All these hopes and dreams of the world are not of God.

Love not the world or the things in the world because they are not of God!

And the world passes away!

That the world passes away seems untrue from the viewpoint of your lives and experiences. You seem to pass away, and your time here is like a dream. In your brief and fleeting lives, you pass through births and deaths, joys and sorrows, pleasant experiences and painful ones, sicknesses and health, and fruitful years and barren ones. Throughout the quick passage of your lives, there are desires, thoughts, plans, purposes, and labors to complete. In them all, you experience that part of the sorrow of the world that is allotted to you; and like a shadow that passes away, so you pass from this earth. And the earth apparently remains.

Such is this the viewpoint of man that scoffers arise and say that all things continue as they have from the beginning. But it is an illusion to think that the world remains. It is part of the illusion that holds men's minds and hearts here on earth enraptured by the world and the things of the world. Belonging to the illusion is the lie that the world is progressing and advancing toward a golden age. But the world passes away. The world is at present passing swiftly away as God directs the world and all its things to their appointed and fiery end.

Oh, believers enjoy the use of the world in the light of scripture. They use the world and experience its delights, but they do not love the world. Do not love this world as that in which you have all your hopes and dreams; as that place where you want to stay for as long as you can;

as that place where your horizon stops, so that you cannot see past it to another.

For there is another world you seek. This world groans and travails now. This creation is only temporary and passes away, and it will pass away with a great noise. All its elements will melt with a fervent heat. From a natural viewpoint the creation as a stage is temporary and was intended to be so. Soon the creation will be no more.

And all that is in the world—its lusts; covetousness; ungodliness; all the products that man has developed in this creation to satisfy his lust for power, sex, health, wealth, order, and advancement—perishes too. Nothing of this world enters God's everlasting creation. All must be consumed in the final conflagration. All the world's working, struggling, laboring, and advancing; all its power, praise, and honor; and all its hopes and dreams—all perish.

Lusts will not be in hell either, for there is no coveting in hell! There is only the terrible wasting of the sinner under the wrath of God, an absolute death.

Love not the world or the things in the world because the world and all its things pass away.

Love God!

Love not the world; love God. That is the antithesis. That is the positive command of the text. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Yes, that is true absolutely. There is an absolute antithesis in these words. The love of the world and the love of the Father are antithetical to one another. There is war between them. There is hatred, hostility, and a gulf so great that it cannot be passed over. You cannot serve God and mammon. If you love the world, then you hate the Father. If you love the Father, then you hate the world and the things of the world. It cannot be otherwise.

There is not in you a certain measure of love for the Father and a certain measure of love for the world, which two things are in constant flux—first the one dominating, then the other dominating. John is speaking—and so the Spirit is speaking—in absolute terms.

Now let me tell you about yourselves. The Bible must tell us who we are. We are strange creatures, very strange. It appears that we are stuck between two worlds. There are strange thoughts and desires that go on in the Christian. The most contradictory, antithetical things are ascribed to this one person. What I do, I do not allow, recognize, or approve. What I will to do, I do not do. What I hate, that is what I do. And then most mysterious of all, what I do, I do not do but sin in me! This all seems to be an impossibility. This willing, hating, doing, and not doing are all attributed to the very same person. In that sphere the one person wills the good but does not do it. He does what he does not recognize. He hates what is evil and does it. And most marvelous and strangest of all, he does not do what he does. I do not do it but sin in me!

You are not stuck between two worlds. You have been translated out of the kingdom of Satan and into the kingdom of God's dear Son. You have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. You have passed from the sphere of that which passes away into the sphere of that which abides. You have the love of the Father in you. The love of the Father is God's own love of himself. God loves himself. He seeks himself and his own glory. He seeks his good and glory in everything. And it cannot be otherwise, for he is the only good and ever-blessed God. He cannot seek anything but himself and his glory, or he is not God.

And in this love God loved you. The great manifestation of that love is the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is the love of God for you. He spared not his own Son. And that love of God he sheds abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to you, so that you love the Father. God loves himself in and through you in such a way that you love God with God's own love of himself. Yes, the Holy Ghost, who in God is the eternal love of the Father breathed between the Father and the Son, is breathed by the Son into you; and the Holy Ghost is breathed from your hearts back to God. That is the love of the Father in you.

And the apostle says that you do the will of God! Do not go to your works when the apostle says that. Do not say, "I love God because I obey him." No, no, the will of God is faith. This is the will of God, that you believe on him whom God sent, even Jesus Christ. You have passed from death to life, and the love of God is shed abroad in your hearts, and you love God because of Jesus Christ. God forgave your sins because Christ paid for those sins, so that you are perfect in God's sight with Christ's perfect love and his perfect obedience to God. And God has translated you out of darkness into God's marvelous light, in which you now stand and in which you walk even as sinners. God has shed his love in your hearts by the Spirit, who is given to you. That is who you are: sinners who have been translated from death to life. Believing in Jesus Christ, in the depth of your beings, in your hearts, you love God in thankfulness for his salvation of you from the world. And there is no love of the world in your hearts! And those who do the will of God abide forever! Yes, Christ in you!

Why then are you so attracted to the world? Because you have that love of God in your hearts with flesh that loves the world. Yes, when you love not the world, then you must hate your own flesh and crucify it. In that flesh there is no love of God but only the love of the world. The flesh loves the world, and the flesh does not love God. The flesh loves the things of the world and does not love the things of God.

You belong to that which abides! You have passed from



death to life. You sit now in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And on earth you are pilgrims and strangers. Here you have no abiding place.

The world perishes. Oh, yes! Everything that you see around you perishes. Not that it will perish at one point in history, but it is passing away now already. From the moment of the fall until now, the world has been passing away. Nothing in the world is permanent. All the things of the world and that fill the world perish as well. The sun, moon, and stars perish. The earth in its present form perishes. The sciences, philosophies, religions, works, and wonders of men perish. Finally, they shall all melt with a fervent heat.

In this world you must live as pilgrims and strangers. You must be fathers, mothers, students, laborers, business owners, church members, and so forth. But you must do that as those who have received this world as an eternal inheritance that will be made new. You must do that as those who love God and seek his glory in everything. And this world you may not love. This world perishes.

Live in the world as those who seek the eternal and the heavenly. Do not set your affections here below. Do not gratify your flesh with the lusts of the flesh. Do not fill your eyes and ears with the lusts of those eyes and ears. Do not stand in God's world with the pride of life, proudly maintaining yourselves and your lusts over against the living God. No, no, do not love the world. Love God. Yes, you must be carpenters, masons, farmers, businessmen, clerks, mechanics, magistrates, and obedient citizens. You must be husbands, wives, and children, but you must live as those who have passed from death to life and who are in Christ and who do the will of God.

All these things and relationships are but pilgrims' staffs and cruses. You are traveling to a new world, a new heaven and earth, where righteousness will dwell. Do the will of God. Believe in God's only-begotten Son, trusting that all your sins are forgiven and that you are righteous before God and heirs of eternal life. Love God. Yearn for him. You are those who have the new world already in your hearts!

—NJL

## FROM THE EDITOR

The July issue of *Sword and Shield* has arrived in your mailbox and is now in your hands, providing you with some edifying reading material for those sultry, summer days to be enjoyed on the patio, at the beach, or sitting in your favorite chair in the comfort of your air-conditioned home! Wherever your chosen place is to sit and read *Sword and Shield*, you will find that this issue is again packed full of sound, Reformed food to fill your soul or like a cool breeze to refresh your spirit.

This month there is a guest editorial written by Aaron J. Cleveland, a member of the board of Reformed Believers Publishing. He gives an insightful analysis of the current state of theology in the Protestant Reformed Churches as evidenced by that denomination's 2024 synodical agenda. His article also gives the current editor a little break from the monthly responsibility of writing the editorial. As a follow-up to the guest editorial, the editor hopes to comment more in future issues on that synodical agenda and synod's decisions, but you will find the July editorial to be an excellent introduction to that subject. Our newest regular writer, Rev. Jeremiah Pascual, in his rubric *Dry Morsel*, explains for the readership what happened in the Philippine churches in the breakup of that

young denomination so soon after its inception. The issue was doctrinal! This month we return to the *Running Footmen* rubric with an article by Ashley Cleveland regarding the promise and the relationship of the promise to the law and to faith in the old dispensation. Since making its appearance on the pages of *Sword and Shield* just about a year ago, the *Running Footmen* rubric has proved to be a valuable addition to the magazine. We plan to continue the rubric for some time to come, and we already have another list of eager volunteers to contribute to the publication of the truth in the months ahead. Caleb Ophoff submitted material for *Insights* regarding the subject of God's immutable love. Keep those submissions coming! We love to hear from our sharp-eared, eagle-eyed readership. Garrett Varner continues his series on the beatitudes by considering the blessedness of the pure in heart. And there is also an answer for Uncle Screwtape to consider. Perhaps he will learn a trick or two from his wily nephew Wormwood about how to destroy a denomination and to take many souls with him. For the rest, we hope that the magazine fills your mind and heart with the pure strains of sweet, Reformed, doctrinal music.

—NJL

# AN ADVERSARY AMONG THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES

## *War on a Sinking Ship*

Nearly three years ago there was a prophetic word of warning issued to the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) on the pages of *Sword and Shield*. That word was,

War has come now upon the Protestant Reformed Churches. The war is between the denomination and God. That is what happens to the church that departs from the truth, graces her evil with the name of God, gives aid and comfort to false teachers and corrupt men, and loves not the truth unto death. An adversary is among the churches.<sup>1</sup>

In denial that war has indeed come upon the denomination, Protestant Reformed ministers and professors speak loudly and write much about God's chastisement of the denomination, like dedicated deckhands shuffled chairs on the deck of the *Titanic* as the ship lunged inexorably toward its doom at the bottom of the ocean.

That war has come upon the Protestant Reformed Churches is the witness of her own 512-page *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*. One wonders what former *Standard Bearer* editor Prof. Russell J. Dykstra has to say about this 512-page quagmire of an agenda.<sup>2</sup> It turns out that the troublemakers whom the leaders of the PRC through her assemblies worked so feverishly to cast out were not the problem of large synodical agendas, after all. "The denomination thinks that she kicked out the adversary, but she invited him in. She kicked Christ to the curb and invited the devil in."<sup>3</sup>

## *Foolish Attempts to Save the Ship by Appeals and Protests*

That Christ has been kicked to the curb and the devil devours in the denomination is writ large upon the pages of the *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*. Rev. Kenneth Koole's theology—"that if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do"<sup>4</sup>—has won the victory in the PRC. That there are four appeals to Synod 2024 regarding Koole's theology is astonishing. Where have the three appellants and the consistory of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church been since 2015? Do they really think that the leaders of the PRC actually agreed with the doctrinal decisions of Synod 2018? Have the appellants not witnessed, as Paul—who kept the raiment of those who slew Stephen—the casting out of the city and the stoning of those who dared to defend the sovereignty of God in salvation? Do the appellants now think that the same assemblies that kicked Christ to the curb and invited the devil in have now seen the light?

Appellant Dan Van Uffelen highlights the foolishness of his appeal with several candid, blistering observations about how things work in Classis East of the PRC. In the introduction to his appeal, he writes,

With these decisions [to exonerate Reverend Koole], I believe Classis East undermined a fundamental principle of Reformed church government by sidestepping the binding character of Article 31 of the Church Order. Further, by declaring Grandville's references to Synod 2018

1 Nathan J. Langerak, "Chanticleer," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 8 (October 15, 2021): 17.

2 Russell J. Dykstra, "PRC Synod 2018, Agenda," *Standard Bearer* 94, no. 16 (May 15, 2018). Dykstra's hostility toward those who stood for the truth was evident when he sanctimoniously wrote, "Also at Synod are four protests of statements or actions of the Synod of 2017, and an appeal of a decision of a classis. These protests make up 264 pages of the 427-page agenda. Synod may be forced to appoint a study committee to address the problem of ballooning protests and appeals. There is no good reason that protests or appeals should number in the scores, much less hundreds of pages. All consistories are willing in good faith to assist members so that they can bring the clearest, most precise protest/appeal with all the supporting documents needed. It is positively detrimental to overload the ecclesiastical assemblies with a mountain of documents. To put it into perspective, how many of us recently picked up a book of 427 pages, and not only *read* it in a month, but *studied* it in order to be qualified to discuss and make decisions on its content? That is what we are asking all the delegates to synod to do."

3 Langerak, "Chanticleer," 17.

4 Kenneth Koole, "What Must I Do...?," *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 7.



to establish a judgment of false doctrine to be insufficient, Classis undermined the settled and binding decisions of Synod 2018 (along with the decisions of every other major ecclesiastical assembly) and thereby threatened the unity of our denomination. Consequently, Classis made erroneous doctrinal decisions that conflict with the decisions of Synod 2018 and contradict the clear teachings of God's Word and the Reformed Confessions.<sup>5</sup>

The guiding principle in Protestant Reformed ecclesiastical assemblies is the honor and reputations of men, especially the preservation of the reputations of long-serving Protestant Reformed clergy and the ministers' and professors' access to denominational funds for a comfortable living.<sup>6</sup> Publicly, Protestant Reformed leaders write sanctimoniously about the "settled and binding" character of ecclesiastical decisions. Take, for example, Professor Gritters' editorial in the *Standard Bearer* of August 2020, in which he wrote,

What is first required of a Reformed church member is the recognition that these decisions [of Synods] are settled and binding. "Settled and binding" are the words used in the Church Order (Art. 31) to describe the nature of ecclesiastical (consistory, classis, or synod) decisions. "Settled" means that the matter is finished. "Binding" means that the decision is legally in force, may be enforced or applied, and must be honored and submitted to by all parties. Even if someone disagrees with a decision, he is still required to submit, to acquiesce. He may claim freedom of conscience in the matter, but he is forbidden to agitate against the decision. He may not propagate his contrary views. This is a strong and important principle in Reformed church government.<sup>7</sup>

And remember Professor Cammenga's shouting "settled and binding!" from the rooftops a few short years ago? As long as the Protestant Reformed leaders supposed that article 31 of the Church Order could be used as a club to silence opposition to false doctrine, these leaders were valiant defenders of article 31. When the decisions of Synod 2018 are assaulted...crickets.

Why is this? When the doctrine of what man *must* do to be saved and the reputations of those who defend this doctrine are at stake, it follows that man wins in the ecclesiastical assemblies. And man's rule in the assemblies is God's judgment on those assemblies and their decisions. Man's rule becomes completely arbitrary and lawless.

Appellant Van Uffelen points out that Classis East argued that

the decisions of Synod 2018 are not the equivalent of biblical and confessional proof. Grandville should have applied the biblical and confessional basis of the decisions of Synod 2018 to this concrete case.<sup>8</sup>

The appellant identifies with a question the logical conclusion of the reasoning of Classis East:

If it were inappropriate and insufficient to appeal to synodical decisions in order to establish judgments of orthodoxy and false doctrine, why would synod bother to make doctrinal decisions at all?<sup>9</sup>

Besides, argues the appellant, Classis East "unwittingly," in one of its grounds, acknowledged that Grandville's consistory *did* use the confessions in its charge of false doctrine against Reverend Koole.<sup>10</sup>

Having kicked Christ to the curb and having invited the devil in, the assemblies, ruled by man, will continue to plunge the Protestant Reformed Churches further into doctrinal departure.

5 Appeal of Dan Van Uffelen, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 252.

6 Board of Trustees' Report: Emeritus Fund Review, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 19–26. Do not worry about the finances of emeriti and about-to-be-emeriti ministers and professors in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Four million dollars are currently available for their support, and the best and brightest financial minds have been tasked with making sure that this money is around for a long time.

7 Barrett Gritters, "What Do *You* Think about Synod's Decisions?" *The Reformed Prohibition of Agitating*, *Standard Bearer* 96, no. 19 (August 2020): 440.

8 Appeal of Dan Van Uffelen, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 255.

9 Appeal of Dan Van Uffelen, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 256.

10 Appeal of Dan Van Uffelen, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 259. The appellant writes, "Subground 1. b. iv.) states that 'Although the protestants argue that Rev. Koole's apology and Grandville's announcement to its congregation include a note that the Consistory pointed out a contradiction to the Confessions (Meelker, *Agenda*, pg. 155), this is not demonstrated in Grandville's decision (*Agenda* pg. 68.)'

This ground unwittingly acknowledges that from the very beginning of the case, Grandville demonstrated its charge of false doctrine with the confessions. Classis knew this. It knew that Grandville used the confessions in its evaluation of the protest of XXX; it knew that Grandville used the confessions to convince Rev. Koole that he needed to apologize for false doctrine; it knew that Grandville used the confessions in its congregational announcement; and it knew that Grandville used the confessions in its correspondence with Mr. Vander Schaaf."

Another evidence that war has come to the PRC is the plague of sexual abuse from top to bottom within the churches. The Protestant Reformed denomination has become a habitation of cruelty. Why is this? When professors, ministers, elders, consistories, classes, and synods have for many years now exerted themselves in aiding and comforting oppressive false teachers—Rev. Ronald Van Overloop and Rev. Kenneth Koole, for example—and when the churches have exerted themselves in silencing and censuring the truth (witness the outrage and opposition to the publication of *Sword and Shield*) and have slandered, oppressed, and cast out as troublemakers those who defended the truth, is it possible that a plague of abuse is God’s judgment on the whole business?

In the *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda* are six protests of the decision of Synod 2023 to hire a third party to investigate sexual abuse within the Protestant Reformed Churches. The protestants make some sobering statements about the spiritual state of the denomination. Rev. W. Bruinsma contends that

the very action of hiring a third-party organization casts aspersion on the offices of elder and pastor...

Not only does this make office bearers suspect in their labors in this regard, but it suggests that elders and ministers are incompetent in their work of investigating, assessing, and ultimately dealing with sin.<sup>11</sup>

Reverend Bruinsma also candidly points out the clear violation of the antithesis by synod’s decision to hire Guidepost to do the third-party investigation. Guidepost’s claim on Twitter, writes Bruinsma, is that

Guidepost is committed to strengthening diversity, equity and inclusion, and strives to be an organization where our team can bring their authentic selves to work. We celebrate collective progress toward equality for all and are proud to be an ally to our LGBTQ+ community.<sup>12</sup>

By the admission of the protestants, the Protestant Reformed denomination is in bed with the world and willingly turns to the world to seek relief from the plague of abuse within the PRC. And this amalgamation with the world is necessary because, by the admission of Synod 2023, Guidepost is being used “for the purpose of ‘remov[ing] barriers...of broken down trust’ in our consistories.”<sup>13</sup>

## *No Right to a Separate Existence*

Also scattered throughout the *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda* are increasing evidences that the Protestant Reformed denomination has no right to a separate existence within the Reformed church world. Rev. G. Eriks suggests the following way forward in dealing with the “overwhelming plague of sexual abuse in our churches.” He writes,

I believe there is another way to seek help against the overwhelming plague of sexual abuse in our churches; a way that is in line with the truth of Scripture.

1. Seek out other conservative reformed/presbyterian denominations for help with investigation and how to proceed.
  - a. In many ways the PRCA has isolated itself from the reformed church world so that we do not go to others for counsel and help.
  - b. Instead of going to those who confess the Reformed faith and have a faithful view of the authority of Scripture, we are willing to go to a secular organization.
  - c. We can learn from these other denominations how they have addressed sexual abuse in their denominations and from the mistakes they have made.<sup>14</sup>

Who these “other conservative reformed/presbyterian denominations” are Reverend Eriks does not say. Nor does he elaborate on how they are *confessionally* Reformed. He simply states it as a matter of fact. And know well that “the PRCA has isolated itself from the reformed church world.”

Another example of how things are going in the Protestant Reformed Churches and a window into how others view the denomination is found in the Theological School Committee (TSC) Report. The TSC is recommending to Synod 2024

that Mr. Joseph Dick be admitted to the seminary as a diploma non-licentiate student beginning with the Fall Semester 2024. Upon completing his studies in our seminary, Joseph plans to seek ordination in the United Reformed Churches in North America.<sup>15</sup>

11 Protest—Rev. W. Bruinsma, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 487. Reverend Bruinsma argues that the decision of Synod 2023 to hire a third party lends credence to the notion that ministers and elders have lost credibility among the members of the PRC.

12 Protest—Rev. W. Bruinsma, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 489.

13 Protest—Pete Cnossen, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 492.

14 Protest—Rev. G. Eriks, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 500.

15 Theological School Committee Report, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 145.



Mr. Joseph Dick is the son of Rev. Mitchell Dick, champion of homeschooling and, since his departure from the PRC, a pastor in the United Reformed Churches (URC). Apparently, the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches is now viewed as a suitable institution to train ministers for the URC. And the TSC views this instruction as part of the mission of the Protestant Reformed seminary.

Found in the report of the Reformed Witness Hour Committee (RWHC) is the following:

The third unique item we dealt with this year was hosting the West Michigan Conservative Reformed Young Adults (WMCRYA). The WMCRYA is a group of young people, roughly college age, from various Reformed denominations in the West Michigan area who routinely fellowship with each other. They gather roughly once a month at one of the local churches for a time of singing and refreshment. The RWHC provided this group dinner after church one evening. In exchange for dinner, we were able to give a short presentation on who the RWHC is and what we do.<sup>16</sup>

The leaders of the Protestant Reformed Churches have successfully expelled from the denomination the doctrines that once gave the denomination a right to a separate existence in the Reformed church world. Those who defended the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation have been cast out or have left the denomination. What remains is a denomination of the same flavor

as the United Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. And everyone in the Protestant Reformed Churches from top to bottom knows this: seminary professors who prepare students for ministry in the URC, ministers who teach and write blatantly false doctrine, elders who condone the false doctrine of their pastors in the consistory room and at classes and synods, Protestant Reformed young people who join in singing hymns with the young people of other Reformed denominations that teach blatantly false doctrine, and finally the young people, well taught by their pastors and parents, who join in marriage with the young people of the United Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with the blessing of their Protestant Reformed consistories.<sup>17</sup>

When Protestant Reformed observers go to the yearly gathering of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), there may appear to be a formal distance between the PRC and the URC above the table. But under the table, in the everyday lives of the members of these denominations, they are holding hands and playing footsie. The PRC once dwelt in safety alone. No longer. The world and the carnal, nominally Reformed have inundated the Protestant Reformed Churches. And no one seems to notice or care. Life goes on and celebrations are planned.

But war has come upon the Protestant Reformed Churches, and an adversary is among the churches.

“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

—Aaron J. Cleveland

16 Domestic Mission Committee Report, in *PRCA Synod 2024 Agenda*, 100.

17 An example of this is found in the March 14, 2021, bulletin of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church: “Per her request, the membership papers of VVV have been sent to her home. VVV has been attending Grace Fellowship OPC in Zeeland with her fiancé, where they plan to attend.” And when a young man left Hudsonville church to join First Reformed Protestant Church, the elders at Hudsonville demonstrated in their bulletin of February 14, 2021, what they thought of the Reformed Protestant Churches: “The consistory has granted the request of WWW, that we send his baptismal papers to his home.”

Another example is found in the March 31, 2024, bulletin of Grace Protestant Reformed Church: “Per her request, the membership papers of XXX have been sent to her home. She plans to join Grace URC in Alto, MI, where her fiancé, YYY, is a member. XXX and YYY are looking forward to making their wedding vows on April 19. May the Lord richly bless XXX and YYY and lead them in their married life together.”

Another demonstration that the PRC has no right to a separate existence is an announcement that was read from the pulpit of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church on the morning of February 19, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v\\_hx8oC8l0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v_hx8oC8l0): “The consistory has approved and asked me [Rev. Daniel Holstege] to read the following announcement to you this morning. ‘The consistory has an announcement of reconciliation with Mr. ZZZ, who left our congregation in 2016 while under discipline for sins that violate the fourth and fifth commandments. In 2016 we informed the congregation of this so that you could pray that God would soften ZZZ’s heart and his turning away from the church. And the Lord has answered these prayers. ZZZ has recently confessed his sins to the consistory that he is truly sorry and has remorse for what he did and wanted to apologize to the elders who worked with him. The consistory has approved his confession. We pray that he may grow in the grace of Jesus Christ in his new church home at Ottawa Reformed Church in West Olive.’” The sentiments of the announcement were reinforced by Reverend Holstege in the congregational prayer following the announcement. After the prayer the whole congregation should have walked out of the building and joined Ottawa Reformed Church.

*Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.—Proverbs 17:1*

## WHAT HAPPENED IN THE PHILIPPINE CHURCHES? (1): THE THEOLOGY OF ARK-BUILDING

### *Introduction*

In September 2020 I listened online to Rev. Andrew Lanning's evening sermon preached in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church.<sup>1</sup> I became interested in listening to that sermon because Reverend Lanning's sermon from the previous week on Matthew 10:20<sup>2</sup> had generated discussions among some young men in the Berean and Provident Protestant Reformed churches in the Philippines. Those men had argued against the theological position of Reverend Lanning that Noah did not build the ark, and they argued instead for the historical explanation of Noah's building the ark.

Knowing the Protestant Reformed churches in the Philippines, I know that they have the officebearers' support for their views. In those churches doctrinal discussions are quite lively. Men of Berean and Provident love to engage in theological discussions. I experienced being with them, and I enjoyed such activities. However, I admit that there was much more deafening noise than edification during those discussions.

I remember that Rev. Vernon Ibe invited the young men into his office to pique their interest in the Reformed faith. He welcomed theological discussions. The last topic I discussed with him was about the celebration of Christmas day with a worship service. That subject would inevitably create a chasm between Berean Protestant Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan. Bulacan was known as a staunch critic of celebrating Christmas day with a worship service. She consistently

had argued that worship services held on holidays are against the regulative principle of worship. Reverend Ibe was well aware of that, so he wanted the young men to engage in a heated discussion about Christmas day. That is why I can say that the officebearers were very much involved in discussing Reverend Lanning's sermon about Noah's building the ark.

Unfortunately, the young men in my church, the then Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan, were not interested in theological discussions. We only enjoyed hearing Rev. John Flores' jokes after the worship services. It was also customary for him to speak ill of the Protestant Reformed missionaries. Also, instead of delving into in-depth discussions of Reformed dogmas, we were busy working for him under some foreign crypto corporations, even on Sundays! Just imagine that. So rarely did I have a long discussion with Reverend Flores on Reformed distinctives. We were very carnal in that church, minding worldly cares while being unaware of the coming doctrinal unrest that began in our sister. While others in the denomination were beginning to have an interest, Bulacan was unaware. It makes sense that the Berean and Provident churches were the only places where people talked about Reverend Lanning's sermon on Matthew 10:20, while the men in Bulacan expressed no interest.

I was still in the seminary when I learned about the sentiments of young men from the Berean and Provident churches. Just a week after the sermon about Noah was delivered, they began discussing, with preconceived

1 Andrew Lanning, "By Faith Noah Prepared an Ark," sermon preached in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church on September 20, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLpDVBpnGcY&t=118s&ab\\_channel=DiscipleshipManor](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLpDVBpnGcY&t=118s&ab_channel=DiscipleshipManor). It is surprising that I found a copy of the sermon uploaded on YouTube. I do not know the uploader, but hopefully the sermon will remain available on this platform because Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church removed the sermon from SermonAudio.

2 This sermon was also removed from SermonAudio. In the sermon Reverend Lanning had made the statement that Noah did not build the ark. The statement sparked controversy both in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines and in the Protestant Reformed Churches of America (PRCA). Byron Center's consistory took a decision to require Reverend Lanning to clarify his statement, which occasioned the sermon on Hebrews 11:7. Although the discussions among the men in the Philippines seemed to end after the Matthew 10:20 sermon, I continued to hear reactions from the PRCA, which reactions led me to continue to follow the controversy regarding the theology of ark-building.



accusations, that Reverend Lanning was in error. My closest friends in the denomination learned the views of those young men and relayed them to me. So I listened to the sermon; but instead of being angry with the Reverend, I was comforted that God is the sole savior of my soul. I agreed with the Reverend: *Noah did not build the ark.*

### *The Man Noah*

Historically, Noah built the ark. All Reformed men can concur with this because it is a plain, biblical affirmation of redemptive history. Noah and his family worked to build the ark. We can visualize a sweating, historical Noah day in and day out, his hands calloused by hard, daily, manual work. *Noah built the ark* for some one hundred and twenty years. If you wanted to go down there, surely you could always come back with some evidence of a historical man with unbelievable endurance and ark-building skills. Go down there and try Noah with his fear of God, and you will see an obedient man, the last righteous man of his generation after Methuselah died. Aside from observing Noah's ark-building, you could hear him preach. How lovely to see and hear the witness from the aged Noah's building and preaching. I would have loved to pick up a mallet and join him in that tireless and seemingly unending labor.

After going over Noah's history, you may always tell your children about him. Our catechism material for juniors asks, "Why did God save Noah and his family?" The answer is, "Because Noah walked with God and was righteous in a world filled with wickedness."<sup>3</sup> Historical Noah was saved through his *historical* walking with God. His whole family was saved from the flood because he walked with God. Peter says in 1 Peter 3:20, "Eight souls were saved by water." Not even by the ark Noah built nor by his walking with God were the eight souls saved. But if you want to focus on historical Noah, his obedience and his walking with God would be all there are.

Then meeting Noah could immediately incite rage. Shaking his calloused hand would make me mad. Spending many years with him, way beyond my life expectancy, would make me impatient. I know the man and his work. I would never ignore what he had done. He had a huge undertaking that involved gathering, cutting, swinging the mallet, and all the manual labor that you could think of. I would absolutely argue that *Noah did build the ark*. Spending time with scripture would undoubtedly lead to such a conclusion. Thus the sentiments of the young men from the Protestant Reformed Churches

in the Philippines against Reverend Lanning would make sense. All could agree with their sentiments about Noah in history. I did an exegesis of Hebrews 11:7 as part of my seminary requirements, and I arrived at the same conclusion: *Noah did in fact build the ark.*

But in my exegesis of the passage, I felt tired of seeing Noah. All the toiling, gathering of gopher wood, and hammering wore me out. I still felt hopeless even after I had seen that the ark was finally finished. Noah had no power to save. His activity of faith could not save him. His activity of walking could not save him. His building would eventually come to naught after the fierce judgment came against all depraved, wicked persons. Noah's preparation of the ark was tainted with sin. He had his father and grandfather helping him, but it availed nothing. The problem of sin is generational. Sin runs through the blood of every sinful household. Noah and his family were no exception. They too were depraved sinners. Noah's ark could never stand the coming great flood. The prediluvian period was ending, and his ark would betray his unworthy building of it. The period would end with Noah's generation. That would be the end of him. Yes, my exegesis was historically informed. Yes, I saw the activity of Noah's faith. And, no, I did not disregard the wonder of grace that he actually prepared an ark by faith. He consciously believed God's word of warning.

Rev. W. Bruinsma even asserts that when God talked to Noah, it was because Noah had walked with God.<sup>4</sup> But what is the point? What is the point of starting and ending in man? I could have a lecture about Noah's ark, but I could not preach that. I could spend all day praising Noah's mighty faith. But that surely would only tickle your ears. As regenerated children of God, you can believe, repent of your sins, and draw near to God. And you *must* do that. Those who do not do that will surely perish in their sins.

Herman Hoeksema says in his astounding sermon on Acts 16:30–31:

Listen. We must believe? Oh, that's true. But is that the gospel? Is that the gospel? *We* must believe? *We must* believe? If that were the gospel, beloved, the gospel could never be realized. I say once more, to be sure we must believe. But there is no hope in that statement, and there is no salvation in that statement because if you only say that we must believe, which means of course, that nobody has the right not to believe, and

3 H. C. Hoeksema, *Old Testament History in Brief for Juniors* (Protestant Reformed Churches, 1961; repr., 2012), 6.

4 Wilbur Bruinsma, "By Faith Noah Prepares an Ark," sermon preached in Pittsburgh Protestant Reformed Church on April 11, 2021, [sermonaudio.com/sermon/411212236457376](http://sermonaudio.com/sermon/411212236457376).

nobody has the right to be an unbeliever. That we are obliged before God to believe, yes, yes, yes. There's no hope in that. That's not the gospel.<sup>5</sup>

I ask you, reader, and this is not a rhetorical question. Many who have heard this question have spewed unmitigated hate. When you hear the call of the gospel is that the gospel itself? That is, if you believe and repent, you will be saved. Is that the gospel? Is it the gospel to insist on Noah's building the ark?

### *Built by Faith*

Reverend Lanning taught the people of God to understand the theological significance of that account in redemptive history. He preached Jesus Christ instead of man. Noah was a man of God *but* a mere man—nothing but a man. His best works in this life were all imperfect and defiled with sin (Heidelberg Catechism, A 62). Thus preaching must never be about man but about God in Jesus Christ. God must always be central in the preaching of the gospel. No matter what the theme of a passage is, the Holy Spirit speaks only about God and his work. And in the case of Noah, the Spirit takes all the historical details and explains them in two words: “by faith” (Heb. 11:7). Yes, Noah prepared an ark, but he did it by faith. That is how the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews comments on Genesis 6. Through inspiration the writer makes plain that Noah's preparation of the ark was by faith. That faith demonstrated God's gracious attitude of favor toward Noah. Faith is of God and is the bond through which we receive Jesus Christ and all his benefits. Faith is always fixed on the person and works of Jesus Christ. Out of faith we receive the peace of justification. Through faith God silences our consciences and speaks the forgiveness of sins with our spirits, so that we are assured of our place in Jesus Christ.

Our eyes are being fixed not on Noah's ark per se but on an ark whose builder and maker is God. That ark was God's work, illustrating how he graciously saves his people from his wrath. That ark preserved Noah and his family, the church, so that when judgment and their salvation came, God preserved them and made his abode with them. That ark was typical of God's blissful covenant fellowship with his people through Jesus Christ. All their needs were there and supplied by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. That ark was typical of the church as the vehicle of salvation. Out of the church there is no salvation. Outside that ark built by God, there was no salvation. Noah and his family were kept in the ark. They were

antithetically living with God while they were kept in his sovereign, particular, and electing love in Jesus Christ—Christ, the only Son of man who has walked perfectly with God, so that Noah and his house could be righteous before God, could be saved not only from the flood but also ultimately from God's temporal and eternal judgment, of which they all were as worthy as the wicked, prediluvian world.

Reverend Lanning made a clarification in his sermon on Hebrews 11:7, when he said,

It is true Noah did not build the ark. It is true that Jehovah God built the ark. In fact, that is the gospel of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ... Noah built an ark to the saving of his house, but Noah did not save his house. God saved Noah's house. Jehovah God has given salvation to us through faith in Jesus Christ, but we do not save ourselves through faith in Jesus Christ. God saves us through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no retracting and no retreating from the statement “Noah did not build the ark; God built the ark.”<sup>6</sup>

God did not save Noah and his family because Noah had walked with God. Eight souls were saved by the water that held them up in a higher state while God was condemning the world. That is Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus Christ, Noah and his family were saved. This gospel needs no apology. You cannot overemphasize this gospel that begins and ends with God in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 11:7 begins with God and ends with God. It begins with faith and ends with faith.

### *The Box*

Reverend Lanning's sermon was instrumental. It exposed the hearts of men in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America and in the Philippines. The fad for man's theology was gradually being exposed, not only by classical and synodical decisions and by many man-centered sermons but also by the continued hunt for ministers who preached God-centered sermons against man's doing for salvation. I was surprised to hear men arguing against the sermon regarding the theology of ark building. Noah prepared an ark *by faith*. If the historical significance of Noah and the ark he built had already been established, there should have been no reasonable argument against the insistence on the account's theological implications.

Reverend Lanning established the historical facts of the ark-building. He said,

5 Herman Hoeksema, “The Calling of the Philippian Jailor,” sermon preached in Hull, Iowa, on July 5, 1953, [https://oldpathsrecordings.com/wp-content/uploads/sermons/2020/09/04-The-Calling-of-the-Philippian-Jailer-7\\_5\\_53.mp3](https://oldpathsrecordings.com/wp-content/uploads/sermons/2020/09/04-The-Calling-of-the-Philippian-Jailer-7_5_53.mp3).

6 Lanning, “By Faith Noah Prepared an Ark.”



Genesis 6 is full of the activity of Noah, who did according to all of the commandments of God. What we are describing here is the historical fact. Noah did what God said. Noah prepared an ark. Noah built an ark. That's a historical fact. That does not describe the theological reality. The theological reality, the doctrinal truth of the building of the ark, is explained in Hebrews 11:7. The theological reality of building the ark is this: by faith Noah prepared an ark. By faith Noah built an ark.<sup>7</sup>

What the majority want is man. They want the man Noah to be preached in the pulpits. They want the ark made of gopher wood and full of nails. They want to be sent home by every blow of Noah's mallet. They want the box (ark) as a mere container of obedient people saved by Noah's walking with God.

No, that box was a symbol of death. That box was not designed to float and to endure the great waves of the flood. That box had no steering gear or spindle! The door was shut. No one could enter or go out once the door had been shut. And God shut the door! From man's perspective—after many years of building; seeing unimaginable, heavy rains for the first time; and receiving diverse oppositions from the wicked—that box was a casket, after all! From man's point of view, that box was death. Every fallen man sees death in that ark. This explains why, after so many years of Noah's preaching and building, only eight people were saved. The gospel must offend man. It must preach the death of man in its every presentation so that God remains the only sovereignly active one in the work of salvation. God has ordained the presentation of the gospel that way so that it becomes the savor of death unto death to the reprobate wicked and a savor of life unto life to the elect. In that way God is glorified. He alone deserves that. For only his power is revealed in the preaching of the gospel. Ordinarily, that proclamation is offensive.

Reverend Lanning's preaching exposed what many in the Protestant Reformed Churches believe. They want Noah to participate actively in the work of salvation. For them Jesus Christ is not enough, and the water was not enough to save Noah and his house. They want every swing of the mallet and the calluses on the hands to make the gospel of Jesus Christ a matter of carnal things.

But this is contrary to Hebrews 11's doctrine of faith—the evidence of things unseen. Faith itself is the evidence of our spiritual salvation. Noah's faith, not the ark per se, already was salvation. Historically speaking, salvation was the water that was yet to come, which was yet unseen.

But because Noah was given faith, he prepared an ark for his house. And the ark that he prepared was built by Jehovah to preserve Noah and his family from the coming judgment. They were saved by Jehovah himself through judgment. The church in Noah's time was saved through judgment.

Through Reverend Lanning's sermon I saw Jesus Christ. I was convinced that the gospel of sovereign grace requires man's death. No matter how accurate our history is, when Jesus Christ is displaced, man will always assume Christ's rightful place. We are always inclined to brag about our activity of believing and walking with God. Taking a tight grip on man destroys the gospel. It could destroy the box we once loved because Noah was actually dead in there. The ark was a casket. Noah could do nothing. The people in there were dead. They were rather passively waiting by faith for their salvation. *But death for them was a blessing. It meant all of God and nothing of man.*

This is the gospel that comforted me through that sermon. It needs no apology, not even a clarification, which the consistory of Byron Center required of Reverend Lanning. He used no vague language; he preached only the truth of Jesus Christ. The problem was men who thought themselves to be as high as the height of the ark and as sufficient as the ark. They were so quick to criticize and interrupt Jesus Christ's speaking. They only wanted the hands of a carpenter, while forsaking the Builder who built the ark to the saving of Noah's house. The only remedy they need is the flood, which covers even the highest mountain on earth. The baptizing blood of Jesus Christ cleanses the insurmountable sins of his people.

### *Amazing Obedience*

Rev. W. Bruinsma was the first minister I heard refuting the ark-building theology preached in Byron Center by Reverend Lanning. Reverend Bruinsma deemed the theology of ark-building to be illogical and a spiritualization of Hebrews 11:7. He preached,

God did not build the ark. Noah built the ark. It would take quite a stretch of human logic, people of God, to say that Noah did not build the ark and that God himself personally built that ark. That Noah built the ark is a fact that is beyond dispute. Noah built the ark. The writer to the Hebrews also informs us that Noah built the ark to the saving of his house.

Now, there are those who, in some way, would like to spiritualize that "saving of his house," so

<sup>7</sup> Lanning, "By Faith Noah Prepared an Ark."

that they would relate that to the salvation now that you and I receive in Jesus Christ. That's not the intention of the inspired writer here in Hebrews 11. Our text states a simple *fact*. By means of the ark, Noah was able to save—that is, literally, deliver, preserve, and keep safe his family alive in that ark. He was able to save his household. The ark saved his family from the sudden death that fell upon the entire human race. So the writer to the Hebrews does not intend to spiritualize that matter.

The Bible speaks of the salvation of the church in other passages in different terms. It speaks of the salvation of the church by means of the water of the flood. It does not speak of the church by means of the preparing of an ark. It speaks of the saving of the church at that time by means of the waters of the flood itself.<sup>8</sup>

Reverend Lanning did not say that God personally built the ark. Instead, when Reverend Lanning said the ark-building was by faith, that is God. How can you spiritualize that? Hebrews 11 is about faith. It is not about Abel, Enoch, and Noah. You cannot turn your head in Hebrews 11 without bumping into the fact that God is the only way to understand that section of scripture. Sure, Abel offered unto God, and Abraham obeyed God. They were active in doing that. No one is denying that. Those who believe receive life from God and have all the manifestations of being alive in Jesus Christ. Abel and Abraham evidently had those manifestations. But the intention of the writer to the Hebrews is that you see God in and through their lives. Abel offered unto God by faith, and Abraham by the same faith obeyed God. God worked in them. He took the obedience of Jesus Christ and imparted it to them. Understand then that on their own, they did not do that, nor did they have the ability to do that. The only explanation, then, is God. How else can you explain Noah's preparing the ark? Only theologically. A theological explanation is not spiritualization but an honest and inevitable evaluation of the passage.

What the Protestant Reformed Churches want is the fact that Noah did build the ark. They still want the activity of Noah. This is against the plain teaching of Hebrews 11. Enoch was translated by faith. Through faith Sarah received strength to conceive seed. Both verbs are in the passive voice. Enoch was translated by faith, and it is beyond logic to say that the emphasis is Enoch's activity of faith. The same holds true for Sarah, who received strength from God through faith. Receiving,

in the Calvinistic perception, is very much *passive*. Also, Abel was already dead but still speaking. How can you explain that historically? Abel did speak! Oh, yes, but when he was dead. And according to the grammar, Abel still speaks. The only explanation is that he had to die to speak. Believers must die before they become alive. Noah and his house had to die in the box before they were saved. Hebrews 11 is clearly not emphasizing the activity of faith. Since that is the case, although Noah built the ark historically, he did not build it theologically, but God did. God built it, and this truth is evident in God's making Noah and his house passive in the work of salvation.

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra added to the theology of the man Noah and his activity and focused on the good works and the obedience of Noah. For Professor Dykstra it is more logical and acceptable to assert this because in this way Noah is not robbed of his rightful activity, which God had determined Noah to do. For Professor Dykstra building the ark was all about Noah's activity and his amazing obedience to God. Professor Dykstra preached this:

Now to be clear, it is not wrong to say, "God built the ark." It wouldn't be wrong to say that, although you would have to explain that. What do you mean by that? Certainly, if you would say, "God built the ark," it's not the same as God creating the heavens and the earth. God created the heavens and the earth by speaking the word, and it was. That's not the way the ark came into existence at all. It could be said that God built the ark in the way that you could also say, "God killed Goliath." By God preparing David—giving him the ability to use the sling and the stone and giving David the courage and the strength to stand up to Goliath and God guiding the stone and Goliath is killed—you could say, "God killed Goliath." You could say when you go home tonight, "God preached to us tonight," because God used a human being to preach you the word...So you can speak that way. But to say those things simply means God calls men and equips them and uses them to accomplish his purpose. And any Reformed person surely understands that. God gives faith. And by that faith God gives grace, and that grace strengthens a believer to carry out the task that God has determined. We are created, in fact, in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained, before prepared, that we should walk in them. And he works in us the will and the

<sup>8</sup> Bruinsma, "By Faith Noah Prepares an Ark."



to do of his good pleasure. So if you want to say, “God built the ark,” and explain it that way, that’s acceptable.

But it is dead wrong to say that Noah did not build the ark. That’s a plain contradiction of the words of the Bible. By faith Noah. He built the ark. That would be as absurd as saying that Abel did not offer a sacrifice that was pleasing to God or to say that Enoch did not walk with God, that he was not translated, or that Sarah did not receive strength to conceive seed. That’s nonsense. To say that Noah did not build the ark is to deny, to deny, the sovereign power of God to work in his people amazing obedience. That’s the seriousness of it. Not only is it a plain denial of the words of scripture, but it’s denying the power of God working in a sinner. Think about that once.<sup>9</sup>

This sermon was about Noah’s amazing obedience. Noah performed good works to the saving of his house. This is not absurd or illogical, they say. As long as Noah built the ark and not God, as long as Noah is presented as an active believer, that is all right. As long as you do not say that Noah was passive, that is logical.

I want to conclude with these words of Herman Hoeksema:

People say nowadays, beloved, “But we must, we must, have the activity of faith.” I don’t know how it is here, here in the West, I mean. But in the East in my church, I think elsewhere too, they like to speak of the *activity of faith*. “You must do something, nevertheless. You mustn’t be so passive.” That’s what they say. “The activity of faith. We are responsible creatures.” Responsible, yes. Responsible. “And our Protestant Reformed preaching has gone too passive, don’t you know? Too passive. And so it’s all right to speak of faith as a gift of God, but let’s forget that because what

we really need to emphasize is our responsibility as Christians and the activity of faith. We must do something now.”

What must we do? Oh, I don’t know. They don’t know either, I think...

It’s all right, beloved, that we speak of the activity of faith. But, remember, the first activity of faith is the activity whereby through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ we lay hold on him. That’s the activity of faith, first of all. The activity of faith does not, first of all, mean that we do great things in the world or great things in the church or that we witness for Christ and that we save souls and the like and the like. That is never the activity of faith in its first manifestation. The activity of faith in its first manifestation is that we cling to Christ. That’s active faith. And by that active faith, we receive out of him all our salvation. That first of all.

And then, oh, yes, if you have that faith and you have that active faith, then I don’t even have to talk about responsibility anymore. It isn’t even necessary. I don’t even have to talk to you anymore about being active. Oh, no. Then this is spontaneous, beloved.<sup>10</sup>

And lastly, these words of Charles H. Spurgeon:

What the Arminian wants to do is to arouse man’s activity; what we want to do is to kill it once for all, to show him that he is lost and ruined, and that his activities are not now at all equal to the work of conversion; that he must look upward.<sup>11</sup>

Noah built the ark. But let us kill the man Noah and his activity of building. He did not build it. The word of God says that Noah built the ark *by faith*; that is, *God* built the ark to the saving of Noah’s house.

God alone gets the glory!

—JP

9 Russell J. Dykstra, “Noah Building the Ark by Faith,” sermon preached in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church on April 21, 2024, <https://beta.sermonaudio.com/sermons/421242352286311/>.

10 Hoeksema, “The Calling of the Philippian Jailor.”

11 Charles H. Spurgeon, “High Doctrine,” sermon preached on June 3, 1860, <https://ccl.org/ccl/spurgeon/sermons06/sermons06.xxvi.html?queryID=36382005&resultID=177162>.

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

## THE PROMISE, THE LAW, AND FAITH IN THE OLD DISPENSATION

*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise... Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.*  
—Galatians 3:16–18, 21–22

### Introduction

The title of this article is the title of a lecture given in 1951 upon the request of the board for the Society of Protestant Reformed Men for Action.<sup>1</sup>

I found this speech by Rev. Herman Hoeksema to be pertinent, reformatioal, and beautiful. I extend this review of his lecture to draw attention to the theology of Hoeksema regarding the promise and the relationship of the promise to the law and to faith in the old dispensation. This lecture, based on the teaching of Galatians 3, provides us with a biblical and creedal template whereby to judge each teaching, the preaching, and our own thinking to see whether they be of gospel or law. Just as Paul combatted the false doctrine of obedience to the law unto salvation in the epistle to the Galatians, so Hoeksema's teaching sets forth the gospel promise of God so brightly that the law-preaching of his day—that the promise was conditioned on the act of believing (activity of faith)—was exposed and laid bare beside his teaching.

We combat the same error today in the form that the Christian must keep the law unto the experience

of his salvation. By making the unnecessary distinction between objective and subjective, between salvation and the experience of salvation, the age-old battle of works or grace continues.

In the introduction Hoeksema lays out a beautiful summary of the content of his speech. He sets the framework for the lecture with order and clarity, so that the listener is easily able to understand his theological instruction and at the same time be challenged to meditate more deeply on the truths he sets forth. He teaches that the church of the old dispensation was under the law, which necessarily meant that the church was under the curse of the law, for the law could never give life or salvation and could only curse. The promise of God came before the law was given, and the promise could not be disannulled or rendered void, not even by the perfect law of God. Further, Hoeksema establishes that Christ, as the legal and spiritual head of his people, was also under the law and the curse of the law. When the promise was realized in Christ, both the law and the curse of the law regarding the elect were abolished, and forever after the church was under grace.

<sup>1</sup> Herman Hoeksema, "The Promise, the Law, and Faith in the Old Dispensation," lecture given in Doon, Iowa, <https://oldpathsrecordings.com/wp-content/uploads/sermons/2021/01/The-Law-the-Promise-Faith-in-the-Old-Dispensation.mp3>.

In the new dispensation, therefore, the apostle argues and shows that we are no more under the law but only under the promise; or, in other words, we are no longer under the law, but we are under grace.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Promise*

Getting into the substance of his lecture, Hoeksema gives attention to a thorough explanation of the promise.

The promise is always the promise of God, and the promise of God is always an oath, an oath of God. It can never be anything else. The promise of God is an absolutely sure pledge, as sure as God is sure, as faithful as God is faithful, absolutely pledged by God to his people without any conditions or requisites attached to it...

Or, if you wish, the promise is also most beautifully expressed in the well-known baptism form. In the first part of the form, we read, beloved, that the triune God is the God of the promise. The Father, according to that form, pledges and establishes an eternal covenant of grace with us, adopts us for his children and heirs, will provide us with every good thing and avert all evil or turn it to our profit. No condition in it. Absolutely unconditional. The Son, according to that same form of baptism, pledges and assures us that he incorporates us into his death and resurrection, that he delivers us from all the guilt of sin, makes us completely righteous before God. And the Holy Spirit, by that same baptism [form], pledges us that he will dwell in us and apply all the blessings of salvation to us from beginning to end. That is the promise.

This connection of the promise of God to the truth of God himself, in Christ, means that we can never make the promise something that rests in man or man's activity. God alone can fulfill or realize his promise. Hoeksema properly distinguishes the part of believers in that promise by placing their part in the realm of the fruit of God's work.

And you may not say that there is another side to that promise. That would spoil it entirely, beloved. The promise is the pledge of God, the sure pledge, the oath of God, to his people, to his elect, without anything attached to it. Although it is true that our part of that covenant is that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and

mind and soul and strength, that is not a condition, but that is the fruit of the fact that God realizes his covenant and promise in our hearts and in our lives. That is Reformed, nothing else.

Hoeksema also grounds the promise in the decree of God.

The promise is unconditional; and, therefore, the promise is for the elect only. Or the promise is conditional, and then you deny election. Those two are inseparably connected.

The climax of Hoeksema's first point, which point is despised and denied today, is that Christ himself is the promise. It is taught today that the promise can, in fact, be disannulled by the law. There is a mingling of that which belongs to the promise with that which is of the law. What that sounds like are the assertions of men who make the realization of the promise to come upon the believer *in the way of* his obedience, without which obedience the promise, or some aspect of the promise, will not come. The sounds of the mingling of law and promise are that obedience to the law, a grace-worked obedience, is necessary *prior to* the work of the Lord to apply the benefits of salvation to the elect; that the elect believer receives the promise in fits and starts according to the measure of his obedience; and that the law, properly preached, actually becomes the promise or part of the promise.

Some examples of this sound are the following:

Rev. Martyn McGeown writes,

God gives power to obey (his grace) by the command itself (admonition). God works faith through the call to faith. God works repentance through the call to repentance. God works sorrow for sin through warnings against sin. God preserves his people in holiness through commands to be holy. God preserves his people through warnings and threatenings...

Second, "the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us." This is not the condition that sinners must fulfill in order to have God's grace work in them, for there are no conditions to grace. Rather, God blesses *in the way of diligence*. God does not bless apathy, laziness, carelessness, or disobedience. God blesses obedience, diligence, prayerful study, and the use of means, both in preachers and in hearers.<sup>3</sup>

2 Hoeksema, "The Promise, the Law, and Faith in the Old Dispensation." All quotations from Hoeksema in this article are taken from his lecture.

3 Martyn McGeown, *Grace and Assurance: The Message of the Canons of Dordt* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2018), 264. This quotation is in the section on Canons 3–4.17, the subject of which is the means of grace in the preaching and command of the gospel, although McGeown makes an application to all the commands and laws of scripture.



Professor Cammenga writes,

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.<sup>4</sup>

And Rev. Bill Langerak asserts, “Good works are necessary to enjoy or experience fellowship with God. Period.”<sup>5</sup>

The position of Hoeksema is that Christ, as the promise, includes every benefit of salvation, which includes all of salvation in every aspect, both objectively and subjectively. The line drawn at this point of the speech equips the believer to follow and contend for the creedal and biblical definition of the promise. Hoeksema quotes Galatians 3:16, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” Then Hoeksema teaches,

It is very plain in this verse that the promise and Christ are the same. Christ is the promise, and the promise is Christ. And not only that, but we must remember that this means, beloved, that the promise is Christ and all his implications and all his fullness. Not only the fact that Christ came but all that Christ *is* the promise, both in the objective and in the subjective senses of the word. Christ as he was born as the Son of God come into the likeness of sinful flesh, born from a virgin; Christ as he grew up among men in this world; Christ as he revealed the Father unto us, especially during the three years of his public ministry; Christ who died on the accursed tree; Christ who rose again from the dead; Christ who ascended up into heaven and sits at the right hand of God—that whole Christ. Remember, that is Christ. That whole Christ is the promise...

Let me look at the cross. That cross as such as a historical fact has very little interest unless we see that cross as part of the realization of the promise of God. It is part of Christ, the whole Christ. As successively he appeared from the year 1 to 33—that whole Christ, the Son of God who died and rose and is in heaven. That whole Christ in all his significance, that is the promise. Don't forget that. That is the promise.

But there is more. That is not the only thing because to that promise also belong all the blessings of salvation, which Christ from heaven

bestows upon his elect. That is also the promise. Not only Christ, but also what Christ does for the church belong to the promise of God. Christ became the Spirit. “Now the Lord is the Spirit,” says the apostle in 2 Corinthians 3. The Lord is the Spirit. Christ became the Spirit, if you will. Christ received the promise of the Spirit. And Christ, having received the promise of the Spirit, poured that promise of the Spirit into his church; and through that promise of the Spirit, Christ realizes all the blessings of salvation. He regenerates us; he calls us; he justifies and sanctifies us; he preserves us; and finally he glorifies us all by his Spirit on the basis of his work. And that all belongs to the promise.

### *Faith and the Promise*

In his second point Hoeksema addresses faith in relation to the promise. He remains grounded in the Heidelberg Catechism, which teaches that faith *is first a bond of union with Christ*, then also knowledge and confidence (Lord's Day 7). Hoeksema does not teach that faith is man's activity or that faith includes faith's obedience to the law. He does not teach that faith relies on obedience to the law for any experience of salvation or for any part of the realization of the promise.

The errors that Hoeksema's instruction battles can include any teaching that sounds like these quotations from Reverend McGeown:

Justification is God's act of declaring believers righteous, while faith is our activity of trusting Jesus for salvation, which is not God's act.<sup>6</sup>

In the Bible and in the confessions the emphasis is on faith as the activity of believing. The Catechism [in Lord's Day 7] defines faith *not as a bond*, and certainly not as a passive, lifeless bond, but as an activity.

But does not the Catechism in LD 7 speak of being “ingrafted” into Christ by faith? It does, but the...word...ingraft[ed] *does not refer to, or even imply, a passive, subconscious bond...* We become members of Christ's body or one plant with Him by believing in Him...

The Bible and the confessions know nothing of a passive receiving of Jesus Christ. According to LD 7 we receive all of Christ's benefits by a true faith, which the Catechism defines as an *activity...*

4 Ronald Cammenga, “Antinomians? Without a Doubt (2),” *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 20 (September 1, 2022): 470.

5 Rev. Bill Langerak speaking on the floor of the February 8, 2024, meeting of Classis East.

6 Martyn McGeown, “Passive Faith?,” *RFPA Blog News*, November 15, 2021, <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/passive-faith>.

The divine order: First, a sinner believes by the grace of God, who gives him faith as a gift; then, he is saved or comes into the possession and enjoyment of his salvation.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to these errors, Hoeksema teaches,

Faith in relation to the promise is a God-given means. Faith belongs to the promise. Faith is part of the promise. The promise includes faith. When God promises us salvation, he promises us faith too; in order that by the power of faith, we might be united with the promise. And the promise is Christ. The promise is Christ. Faith is the power given by the promise, whereby we are united with the promise, with a living power. As the Catechism has it: faith is knowledge, spiritual knowledge—spiritual knowledge implanted by the Spirit in our hearts. Knowledge of what? Knowledge of spiritual things, knowledge of the promise. By faith we know the promise, not so that we can understand it intellectually, but so that we can apprehend it spiritually. By faith we know the promise as our promise. By faith Christ is our Christ, not only as he is objectively before us as he is depicted in the scriptures, but by faith we know that Christ is our Christ. By faith we know that all of the promises in Christ are our promises, so that we are living parts of Christ, so that we are living members of Christ, so that we have all of the blessings of salvation. We know spiritually all of the blessings of salvation as our own.

Hoeksema draws in Hebrews 11, the great New Testament commentary on faith in the old dispensation:

The epistle to the Hebrews speaks of faith especially as an evidence of things unseen and the substance of things hoped for, or as I would translate it: as the assurance of things unseen and the subjective ground of the things hoped for. That is the meaning of that verse undoubtedly in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews. And that is always the case, of course. Faith is always the assurance of things that we do not see. That is always the case. No question about that. That is the case now too. That will be the case until we finally shall enter into glory and see face to face. We cannot see Christ. We cannot see the promise. We cannot see the cross. We cannot see the resurrection. We cannot see the ascension. We cannot see the exaltation of Christ. We cannot see anything of it. Faith is the assurance of things unseen, and faith is the subjective ground of things hoped for.

It is simply so that without faith we have no connection with any of these things that are unseen. But in the old dispensation that was emphasized. In the old dispensation, beloved, the promise was not yet. It was not yet. Nothing was realized yet. Nothing. Christ had not come. The cross and the resurrection and the ascension had not been realized. They all simply waited for the realization of the promise. And, therefore, especially the saints of the old dispensation had faith, the same faith we have; but, nevertheless, that faith always assumed the form of the assurance of things not seen, more than in the new dispensation. That, then, is the relation of faith and the promise.

### *Christ and the Law*

This lecture goes on to give instruction on Christ's relationship to the law. It is specifically striking how Hoeksema explains that Christ was the head of his elect at Sinai when God gave the ten commandments.

But that is why the apostle says in this third chapter [of Galatians]—because of that very fact that Christ was under the law together with his people—the promise could never be annulled by the law. The promise was first, and the promise could never be disannulled by the law because of Christ. That was the case in the old dispensation. Do not forget it.

And now, beloved, in the old dispensation the people of God were under the curse, under the law. The law had not yet been fulfilled. The church, all the elect, were under the curse. And they were under that curse together with Christ. Christ was accursed in the old dispensation. The law said to the people of God, "Cursed is everyone that does not abide in all that is written in me." That was the law. "Cursed is everyone." But do not forget, the law said that not only to the people of God as such, but as the people of God were in Christ. All through the old dispensation, they were in Christ. Christ was there. Christ said, "I represent them. I cover them," in the old dispensation. And, therefore, the law said to Christ, God said to Christ, beloved, "I curse thee. I curse thee unto eternal death." That is what God said to Christ and the law and to Christ and the elect. And Christ, representing the elect, heard that sentence of God throughout the old dispensation: "I curse thee. I curse my only-begotten Son in the flesh, Christ."

<sup>7</sup> Martyn McGeown, "The *Ordo Salutis* (5): Saving Faith: Given to Believe," *Standard Bearer* 100, no. 11 (March 1, 2024): 279, emphasis added.

Again, Hoeksema grounds his theology in the decree of God:

He chose Christ even before he chose the elect. The elect were chosen in Christ. They were chosen into Christ from before the foundation of the world. Christ is the elect. And because he was the elect and because he was the elect representing all the elect and because the elect lay under the curse, therefore, Christ bore before God all through the old dispensation the curse of God—all through the old dispensation.

A commonly held error is that the law in the old dispensation could give life and salvation to the people of God. That wrong thinking can be carried into an erroneous view of the relationship of the law to the New Testament church. There are also errors today that separate the whole Christ into bits and parts. We recognize and appreciate the many aspects of the whole Christ—for example, his incarnation, his suffering, his death on the cross making full atonement for sin, and the glorified and risen Christ. But Protestant Reformed ministers and professors make much of these distinctions to render Christ's whole work of salvation incomplete and unfinished at certain points. And they dangle future benefits of salvation before the eyes of the people to maintain and keep before the people's minds and hearts their necessary acts of faith and obedience in order to receive these future benefits. These errors rob from the people the spiritual reality and significance of the cross and the whole Christ.

In a lecture in which Professor Gritters claimed to clear up much confusion regarding the forgiveness of sins, he took the whole Christ and made him but half a savior, who at the cross accomplished only a mere "provision" for forgiveness.<sup>8</sup> Gritters did that when he made exactly such a distinction between the *provision* or *basis* for forgiveness that Christ made at the cross and the actual *reception* of that forgiveness into his people's hearts, which forgiveness Gritters conditioned on the people's confession and repentance. In Gritters' doctrine of salvation, forgiveness is a benefit of salvation that is received in fits and starts; forgiveness is never realized and enjoyed in complete fullness by the people of God. Forgiveness is only God's response to men after and in measure to the people's acts of confession and repentance. Still more, Gritters denied the reality and harmony of the decree of God when he severed the decree from its realization. Gritters presented God as one who is powerless and ineffectual at the point of the forgiveness of the sins of his people and as a god who begs and waits upon men. Gritters asked

the question, "What is God's forgiveness of us?" He then explained that

God's forgiveness of us is a declaration to us from his mouth to our ears that goes down into our hearts that embrace that declaration by faith...

And the declaration that comes from the mouth of God, that comes into our ears and goes down into our hearts is on the basis of the *provision that he makes in the cross of his own Son...*

Forgiveness is not God's decree to forgive us... Forgiveness is not in eternity...I see why some want to say that's forgiveness. But it isn't. Forgiveness is in time and history and comes from the voice, the mouth of God, to my ear.

There are others who've said that two thousand years ago was forgiveness in *the cross* and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. I understand that too. That's *the judicial basis for forgiveness...*I understand why some say that's forgiveness. But it isn't.

The decree is the eternal root; the cross is the judicial ground; but forgiveness is in time and history...

That declaration comes to us after confession and repentance...

The New Testament makes that very, very clear—the same order. First repentance, then forgiveness. Always that order...

For those who don't repent, God stands silent...

Why the cross? You have to ask yourself that question. Why the cross? And the answer is, because your sins deserve what he got. And you're going to get his blessing *only* when you acknowledge what he got should have come to you. You're not going to hear God speak unless you acknowledge that...

And Gritters claimed that the Old Testament sacrificial system confirms his teaching that forgiveness comes *after* repentance and confession and *aims at* reconciliation. In reference to the Israelites' seeing through the priest the altar of substitutionary atonement and the satisfaction for sins, Gritters taught that

when they saw that and embraced that blessing with believing hearts, they didn't turn around and leave, but they went *in* to God's presence. They lived *with* him because God is symbolizing in that: "I want you to come back and be with me. But it will only be via the forgiveness of your sins. Come back, come back."

8 Barry Gritters, "The Confusion about Forgiveness," lecture given in Grace Protestant Reformed Church on November 3, 2022, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=11522113504354>.



Gritters' doctrine of a fractured Christ was taken up by Rev. Ryan Barnhill, who robbed his congregation when he preached a distinction between forgiveness and Christ's sacrificial death on the cross:

Let me say what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not Jesus Christ dying on the cross two thousand years ago. You mayn't put an equal sign between those—forgiveness equals Christ dying on the cross, shedding his blood there. Those are not the same thing. That's not what forgiveness is. And I think sometimes when we pray, that's what we are thinking about. When I say, "Forgive my sins," that I am really saying, "I thank thee that Jesus died for my sins two thousand years ago." But that's not right.<sup>9</sup>

Hoeksema contends,

And finally, of course, and that was the end of it: he finally came to the cross. That cross was a curse. You know, it is very strange, but it is true nevertheless: God loves his people. He loved them from before the foundation of the world. He loves them with an unchangeable love. That love of God for his elect never changes. God never says to his people, "I hate thee." God never hates his people. He never hated his people at all. He loves his people, and he loved his people from eternity. So, he loved Christ. God never said to Christ, "I hate thee," although he stood before God as the sinner of sinners. That was the case. Christ was before the face of God the sinner of sinners. He was the greatest sinner of all, although personally he was without sin, although as far as his human nature is concerned, he had no sin and no blemish. Nevertheless, juridically he stood at the head of all sinners. And, therefore, he was the sinner of sinners. But God never said to Christ, "I hate thee." He said to Christ, "I love thee, and I pour all the vials of my wrath over thee. I love thee, and I curse thee. I curse the object of my everlasting love. I love thee, and I curse thee unto everlasting death, eternal death. To that I curse thee." That is the cross. That is the cross. The Son of God in human nature, of whom God said from heaven more than once, "This is my beloved Son." That Son of God stood at the head of the elect and bore all their sins and all the wrath and all the curse of God forever on the cross. And on that cross, God himself poured out all the vials of his wrath over the head of his

only-begotten Son in the flesh, so that he really said to Christ, "I love thee. I do not hate thee." He loved Christ. He loved Christ even when Christ said at the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God said in his heart on Golgotha there, "I love thee, but nevertheless I pour out all my wrath over thee, and I curse the object of my love."

And Christ could do that, beloved. Christ could. Golgotha was possible because God of God himself in human flesh represented his people, because it was God of God in human flesh that represented his people and that received the curse of the law, the wrath of God. Therefore, because it was God of God, that Son of God could be obedient unto death and live. Only because of that, Christ was obedient unto death, unto eternal death. He bore the eternal wrath of God for one moment on the cross, and he descended into the depths of eternal death, and he lived. Why? Because, beloved, on the altar of hell—that was the cross—on the altar of hell, Christ laid the sacrifice of willing obedience even unto death, and that sacrifice was sufficient and approved. And Christ, through sin and through the curse of God upon the sin of his people, became the righteous one, as was declared in the resurrection. That is the cross.

And now, beloved, because that Christ... stood at the head of the elect [and] was in the loins of the elect throughout the old dispensation, the elect could bear the curse of the law and live. The promise could not be disannulled by the law. That is my answer to the question, what, then, is the relation between Christ and the elect and the law under the old dispensation?

The law served Christ, the promise, as the way that God decreed that Christ would be the only, full, and complete savior of the elect. The elect, being dead in sins and trespasses, which sins came by the law, could not then be made alive by that law. However, the elect became dead to the law when Christ fulfilled the law and paid the full price of all their sins and trespasses in their place and gave his perfect obedience, righteousness, and holiness to his people. Christ gives his people full and free salvation, both objectively and subjectively. Reverend Hoeksema battles hard against false teachings about the role of the law and beautifully clarifies the relationship of the law to the faith of the saints in the Old Testament church. This truth declares the union of the church in

<sup>9</sup> Ryan Barnhill, "Christ Teaches the Model Prayer: Praying for the Forgiveness of Sins," sermon preached in Heritage Protestant Reformed Church on January 22, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEEHepC8le4>.

every age to her head, Jesus Christ, by faith alone. It also destroys the argument that the law ever held the power to give life, salvation, or a benefit of salvation to the elect.

### *Faith and the Law*

Hoeksema's last point is the relationship of faith to the law. He states that in the narrowest sense the meaning of the word *law* is the ten commandments.

Lastly, the question is, what, then, is the relation of faith and the law? The question, nevertheless, remains, beloved, was there in the old dispensation, was there under law, any revelation of Christ and a revelation of the promise? If you mean by the *law* the decalogue, the answer is, of course, negative. There is no revelation of Christ in the law, not in the law of the ten commandments. There is no Christ in that law, not whatsoever.

He explains the gospel of Christ as it was manifested in the broadest sense of the law, including the ceremonial laws.

But that was not all. If you take the law in the broadest sense of the word, then it includes all the shadows. The people of God were not left under the curse of the law without Christ. Christ was there too in all the shadows of the old dispensation—in the temple, in the tabernacle, in the altar, in the sacrifice.

Therefore, beloved, faith in the old dispensation is principally the same as faith in the new dispensation. There is no principal difference whatsoever. Just as faith in the new dispensation is faith in Christ, just as faith in the new dispensation says, "Thou art the God of my salvation in Christ Jesus, my Lord," so faith in the old dispensation had the same language, looking at the Christ as he was represented in the shadows. In the old dispensation there was the shadows; in the new dispensation there is the reality; but it is the same Christ. Just as faith in the new dispensation says, beloved, "In Christ is all my confidence," so faith in the old dispensation said, "My hope and my confidence are in the Christ that is revealed in the shadows of the temple and the altar and in all the shadows of the old dispensation."

And, therefore, the people of God were under law. Faith was under the law. The promise was under the law. But, nevertheless, beloved, the promise could never be disannulled by the law. And the people of God were saved even under the law by the promise. And that promise is Christ. And when Christ finally came and bore the curse

of the law and removed the curse of the law, he removed the law for all of his people forever. We are no more under the law but under grace only; and we are free forever, free from the law, free in relation to the law, free to serve God in the law—not as a condition but as the free servants of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord in the covenant.

In contrast to the preaching and teaching of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Hoeksema's instruction stands as a bold and glorious declaration of the full and free gospel of salvation. We cannot help but hear a stark difference in the *sound* of Hoeksema's doctrine in his lecture and the doctrine trumpeted off many Protestant Reformed pulpits and written on the pages of the *Standard Bearer*. A few Protestant Reformed members seem to be willing to admit and even have drawn attention to the shift in doctrine and to the contradictions between the Protestant Reformed teaching of today and the historically Protestant Reformed instruction as given by the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema. There are more today who still claim and profess to hold to the same theological positions as Herman Hoeksema. May we all study and rejoice in the biblical and creedal theology of Herman Hoeksema, but "woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous" (Matt. 23:29).

What Hoeksema brings in this lecture is the straightforward presentation of the gospel, the one gospel of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This speech flatly contradicts any preaching or teaching that misrepresents the place of the law and God's purpose with it, the disparagement of election, the perversion of faith's meaning and character, and the unbiblical distinction between objective and subjective, between salvation and the experience of salvation, which distinction is made in order to insert man's activity into salvation. By this speech we are equipped for the battle against works-righteousness, and our spirits are filled with Christ as the full and complete savior of the church of God—the Christ of both the old and new dispensations. We are challenged to thoughtful contemplation of deep matters regarding the promise of God. The beauty and rich depths of the decree of God for the salvation of his people are impressed on our minds. Our hearts are light as we are reminded that the burden of law-keeping is removed, that we are freed to love the law as that which served Christ and our own salvation in him, and that we have the full assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ's work alone. There is no room in this lecture for anything but the glory of God, and the listener's attention is lifted above men up to heavenly and spiritual realities, and they are lovely.

—Ashley Cleveland

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

## GOD'S IMMUTABLE LOVE

### *What Is God's Love?*

God's love is one of his attributes. Each attribute is who God is. God's attributes describe him. He is not composed of his attributes as different parts that come together to make him. God *is* God's love. That God *is* his attributes is one aspect of God's simplicity. God *is* love. He *is* mercy, righteousness, and the rest of his attributes. Therefore, when considering God's love, we can look at his other attributes to help describe his love. God's love has the aspects of eternity, sovereignty, aseity, immutability, and graciousness.

God's love has its roots in eternity. Christ is the Lamb slain before the worlds were made. For the sake of Christ, in eternity God chose his elect unto salvation. Jesus prayed, "Father...thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:24, 26). Out of the Father's love for his Son, God loved us and chose us unto salvation. We have become beloved from eternal election. "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God" (1 Thess. 1:4).

God's love is sovereign. God's sovereign love stretches through all time and has all the power to accomplish its work. The work of God's sovereign love was to send Jesus to accomplish our salvation. That work has been accomplished out of the sovereign power of the almighty God.

There is also the aseity of God's love, which means that God and his love are wholly independent of the receiver and are perfectly self-sufficient.

God's love is immutable. It is unchanging. God loves his people from eternity to their glorification unto all eternity. God's love does not stop during their lifetimes. If God were ever to stop loving his elect, he would not be God. God's love for his people is his will to save elect sinners.

And God's love is gracious. God's love is free, as Hosea 14:4 teaches: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." Nothing is required by God to gain his love. His love is graciously given. God's love is salvation by grace alone.

### *The Protestant Reformed Churches' Improper Understanding of the Love of God*

The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) do not faithfully confess the immutable love of God.

God may have elected you. Christ may have paid for your sins. But if you do not confess your sins, God will change. He will look not at Christ's work but at the works of man. An unrepentant, elect sinner will suffer the wrath of God. Prof. Russell J. Dykstra recently preached the following in a preparatory sermon:

When we do not confess and forsake sin, if we cover our sins and continue in them, *the heavy hand of God's wrath comes upon us*. Psalm 32:3–4: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." It wasn't until he [David] acknowledged his sin, confessed his guilt, that he received mercy.

Failure to confess, failure to forsake, not only brings God's heavy hand upon us, but it says to you and me, as we read in the form tonight, "Do not come to the table of the Lord." You will not receive in the Lord's supper God's assurance of love and mercy for you. You will not experience that if you do not confess. If you do not forsake your sins, you will experience God's judgment—his judgment. Of course, for an unbelieving man, for a reprobate man, that's obvious, but you understand that can happen to us. If we do not confess, if we do not forsake, and think, "Ah, I can come to the Lord's table," there is a judgment, a terrible judgment. Do not come.<sup>1</sup>

How terrible! How frightening for the child of God. God's wrath will be pressed upon you for your sins. The work of Christ and Christ himself, who took all of God's wrath, are cast out. Professor Dykstra has taken the believer from rest in Christ and has thrown the believer

<sup>1</sup> Russell J. Dykstra, "The Antithetical Way of Repentance," sermon preached in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church on April 28, 2024, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=429240636571>.



into despair. How can you know if your repentance is enough? What if you missed a sin? What about the sins you do not even know that you have committed? You cannot attend the Lord's table if you have not repented well enough. Christ is not enough to bring you to his table.

The text that Professor Dykstra used to defend the lie was Psalm 32:3–4, which he explained this way: “It wasn't until he [David] acknowledged his sin, confessed his guilt, that he received mercy.” However, this is not the church's understanding of Psalm 32. Paul in Romans 4:4–8 quotes Psalm 32:

4. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
6. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
7. Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
8. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

We have the mercy of God and the forgiveness of sins without works.

And John Calvin wrote in his commentary on Romans 4:6 thus:

Dissipated also, in like manner, by the words of the Prophet, are the puerile fancies of the schoolmen respecting half remission. Their childish fiction is,—that though the fault is remitted, the punishment is still retained by God. But the Prophet not only declares that our sins are covered, that is, removed from the presence of God; but also adds, that they are not imputed. How can it be consistent, that God should punish those sins which he does not impute? Safe then does this most glorious declaration remain to us—“That he is justified by faith, who is cleared before God by a gratuitous remission of his sins.” We may also hence learn, the unceasing perpetuity of gratuitous righteousness through life: for when David, being wearied with the continual anguish of his own conscience, gave utterance to this declaration,

he no doubt spoke according to his own experience; and he had now served God for many years. He then had found by experience, after having made great advances, that all are miserable when summoned before God's tribunal; and he made this avowal, that there is no other way of obtaining blessedness, except the Lord receives us into favour by not imputing our sins. Thus fully refuted also is the romance of those who dream, that the righteousness of faith is but initial, and that the faithful afterwards retain by works the possession of that righteousness which they had first attained by no merits.<sup>2</sup>

Calvin gave an amazing explanation of Psalm 32. David's anguish, his bones' waxing old, was from the knowledge of his sins and misery, not from God's punishment. God will no longer punish you for your sins. The only way to God's mercy is through Christ. Professor Dykstra has made Psalm 32 to be centered on man and his work. He has taken away the basis of forgiveness—Christ, the vine—and made forgiveness dependent on the work of man, the branch. Christ, the vine, is not enough.

At the February 2024 meeting of the Protestant Reformed Classis East, the doctrine that Calvin had said is “fully refuted” was *added* to the doctrine of the PRC. The issue before the classis was Rev. K. Koole's use of the following quotation of Herman Witsius:

We must accurately distinguish between a right to life and the possession of life. The former must be assigned to the obedience of Christ, that all the values of our holiness may be entirely excluded. But certainly, our works, or rather these, which the Spirit of Christ worketh in us, and by us, contribute something to the latter.<sup>3</sup>

This quotation was not condemned, and the classis judged that Reverend Koole's explanation and use of this quotation did not contradict scripture and the confessions. But this quotation is almost word for word what Calvin refuted:

The romance of those who dream, that the righteousness of faith is but initial, and that the faithful afterwards retain by works the possession of that righteousness which they had first attained by no merits.

2 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948), 160–61.

3 Report of Classis East's Continued and Concluded Session—February 8, 2024, <https://www.prca.org/about/church-government/classis-east/item/6523-report-of-classis-east-session-february-8-2024>.

The PRC has puerile fancies of forgiveness in two parts: the payment and the experience. One has the right to forgiveness by Christ alone, but the possession of his forgiveness is in the way of his holy living. The new doctrine that the PRC holds to creates a distinction that makes justification to be of grace and works. The PRC mixes grace and works. This doctrine means one of two things for a person. One who is proud will look to his works to find comfort in them. He will think that he can fulfill the demands of God's perfection or that God does not require perfect works. Another will be in despair, knowing that God's justice cannot be satisfied by his own filthy rags.

Christ has already taken our sins and their punishment and put them on his account. He has borne the full wrath of God, so that we never will experience the wrath of God. God's wrath is not upon us for our sins, whether we have repented or have not repented. Belgic Confession article 21 says about Jesus Christ,

He hath presented Himself in our behalf before the Father to appease His wrath by His full satisfaction, by offering Himself on the tree of the cross and pouring out His precious blood to purge away our sins...

Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 47–49)

To put our confessions of sin before God's blessings makes Christ's death insufficient, and it makes Christ an incomplete savior. It also takes away from the aseity of God's love. God is not dependent on man in any sense. Yet, we must repent before God's wrath is appeased? Does an independent God wait on that repentance in any sense? By no means. Christ is our complete savior in every part of salvation, imputing to us his own perfect obedience from eternity and freely giving to us all the blessings of salvation. Christ is enough to bring us to the Lord's table.

Repentance and the confession of the sinner are fruits. God's love works in the sinner. God's loving hand gently bends the will of man toward repentance. The Spirit works a hatred for sin in our hearts. He bestows upon us the amazing knowledge of Christ's work, and we repent as a result. God's love gifted us that repentance.

### *Grace or Work?*

Rev. Gerrit Vos wrote a meditation in the May 15, 1953, issue of the *Standard Bearer*, explaining God's unchanging love. Vos wrote this during the conditional

covenant controversy in the PRC in opposition to Rev. Hubert De Wolf's teaching that there are certain prerequisites that one must fulfill to consciously experience his salvation. I quote from Vos' meditation at length here:

What do you desire? To be saved by grace or by works?

That is the question. Shakespeare would say: To be or not to be, that is the question. And it fits here too. To be or not to be in the arms of God unto all eternity. Tremendous question.

There are those that want to be saved by works. Foolish? Yes. Stupid? Yes. Proud? Yes. Offending to God? Yes.

Did any attain unto salvation by the works of the law? No, not one.

Did the Pelagians learn that lesson through the ages? No, they did not. It is an error that is as old as the sinner. Cain is the first Pelagian. He cast a disdainful look at weeping, sobbing Abel, as that righteous man gathered his sticks of wood for the altar, after killing the lamb of God, and went to work: he was going to be saved by his own toil. He brought the sacrifice of the labors of his hand: the fruits of the field. Foolish, stupid, proud, impossible, and an offense to God. But he brought it.

Did he learn the lesson? Even after he killed the correct worshipper? No. Did he learn the lesson after God took him to task and set a sign on the crooked worshipper? No.

Did his corrupt stock learn that lesson? No. They continued the impossible task.

Brethren, that is bad! Very bad.

But it is not the worst you can do.

You do worse when you mix work and grace.

Nebuchadnezzar had the oven made seven times hotter because of the challenging answer of the three children. Why? Because he was very angry. I assure you that God hates the mixer of grace and work much more than the blunt Pelagian.

When you work with all your might to lay hold of salvation, and really hate grace, but when you nevertheless prate about grace no end, you are a double offense to God.

It is either or: grace or work!

Do not mix them. This mixture is a fire that burns and evokes great indignation with God.

Grace or work.

Either the one or the other.

What is salvation by grace?

It is this: God loved you before the world was made. Sovereignly, lovingly, He saw you and willed you and determined you, and said within Himself: on you I will look with favor from this eternity to that eternity. I love you now while I am dwelling in eternity. All the dynamo of My Being is set on you in sweetest love.

I am going to love you when you stand before Me in Paradise, where all things around you testify of that love and will help you to love Me.

And I am going to love you when you shall have become wicked and when you shall smite Me in the Face. I will still go on loving you.

I am going to love you when I will come to you and will stand before you in the Face of My Anointed Son. And I will speak and sing to you of this My everlasting love.

I am going to love you when you shall hate Me and despise Me and turn your back upon Me. I will never cease loving you no matter how wicked you shall have become.

I am going to love you when I shall hear your voice, cursing and swearing and calling upon Me in heaven to witness to the fact that you will have none of Me. Even then I will still love you.

And then you shall tear at Me and beat Me and crucify Me and kill Me, but My love is eternal, and I will still go on loving you.

And then I shall prove My everlasting and beautiful love, because I will actually die for you, the wicked sinner!

But My love is so great and so beautiful and so strong that death shall not be able to hold me in its cruel cords: I shall awake in the garden of Joseph.

And then I shall stand before you, and I will say to you: Do you love Me?

And you? There shall be a blush of shame on your cheeks, and you will stammer: Yes, Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee!

And I will say: Of course, you love Me! I know it. It was I that placed that love in your breast.

Listen, My dear people, I will save you from yourselves, from sin, from guilt, from death, from the curse, from hell, from damnation, from the devil, from the wicked, from the earth, and I will give you My own virtues: I will make you beautiful and spotless as the angels in heaven, no, more beautiful than they: the greater is served

by the lesser. You shall exceed in beauty the holy angels of God.

And I will write My new name on your heart, your forehead. And you shall be called The Beautiful!

And I will recreate a new Heaven and a new earth so that you may have a new dwelling place forever and ever.

And I will come and dwell among you and be a Father unto you and you shall be My sons and daughters.

And your peace shall flow like a river.

And great shall be the peace of your children.

And all this love I will spread abroad in your hearts, while you are walking in the valley of the shadow of death. And that love shall burn in you and shall quicken you, and you shall begin to sing with breaking voice, and you shall look up to Me at times and you shall say, weeping as you go, Abba, beloved Father! I shall continue to spread love in your heart, and faith and hope, and you shall work for the night is coming. You shall notice in your heart, in your inmost heart, that you want to be pleasing unto Me, and you will needs work, but you shall weep again, and say with burning eyes, at night, when all is black: O my wonderful God: to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not!

And then I will show you the nature of My everlasting love, and I will say: I forgive you all your good works! Fret no more, and worry no more! Did you not hear Me say: It is finished!?

My child, My beloved child: you are saved by grace!

That, my brother, is to be saved by grace!<sup>4</sup>

### *Results of God's Love*

How beautiful it is to be saved by grace! We live our lives in this world of sin and misery. We are depraved in our sinful natures, yet God still loves us. He accomplishes the purpose of his love. He saves his people from their misery and causes them to know their salvation. God's love graciously saves us. God's immutable love does not change, no matter the sins into which we fall. God's love does not react to our sins or to our works. He does not love some of his elect children more or less than others. God gives his complete love to his children. We find comfort in knowing that we are loved. We are loved in eternity. We are loved when we sin. We are loved when we love God. We do not need to worry about losing that

<sup>4</sup> Gerrit Vos, "Grace or Work?," *Standard Bearer* 29, no. 16 (May 15, 1953): 361–62.



love by falling short in our good works or our repentance. We experience that love entirely by grace alone.

We are brought into the covenant family where God loves us and we love him. God's love consists of friendship and fellowship within himself. That love is mirrored in the fellowship and friendship of the covenant that he has made with us. The covenant and love are inseparable. Through God's love alone we have fellowship and friendship with our Father, glorious fellowship that erupts from the grace of God alone. Through God's love we are also given the blessings of that covenant. Those blessings of salvation are all of God and his immutable, omnipotent love. We are part of that covenant through Christ, the mediator. He is the beloved. He is the head of the body, the church. We are part of the Son, who receives the Father's infinite love.

On this earth we still go through trials. Our trials in this life are not punishments for our sins. It used to be my understanding when going through difficult times in life that God was putting evils in my life or that he was angry with me for unrepentant sins or for the sins I was committing. This is not the case. God's love does not falter when we sin. God and his love do not change. When God looks upon us, he sees us as righteous and holy through Christ's blood. This is the confession of Belgic Confession article 23:

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

Jesus Christ has justified us and sanctified us at the cross. Our sins are forgiven. We are righteous. We do not need to worry if we have done enough. Our sins have been fully paid for. Nothing more is required of us; no punishment for our sins is put on us. Christ in his love has gone through all the just judgment for our sins. Christ has conquered all the power of the devil. The devil has no power to work evils in our lives. God so loves us that even the sufferings we go through here on earth work toward our salvation. We have forgiveness in every sense. We have confidence that God does not hate us. We do not need to fear his wrath. We rest entirely on Christ.

## *Our Calling*

Out of thankfulness for God's love for us, we will live according to God's law. The summary of the law is given in Matthew 22:37–39:

37. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.
38. This is the first and great commandment.
39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

We love God, and we are also called to love our neighbors. Our neighbors are the people in our lives with whom we cross paths, mostly our family, friends, and church community. When we love our neighbors, we desire the salvation of their souls. What greater love is there than to want them to understand the glorious gospel message of what God has done for his elect? When we love our neighbors, we want them to experience the love of God like we do.

The pure preaching of the gospel is only preached in a true church. If your neighbor is a member of a church that holds to false doctrine, you must tell him. Out of love, you condemn the heresies promoted in that church. A common belief in the church world today is that love is to tolerate differences in doctrine and that simply confessing Christ is the basis for unity. Many say that it is hateful to live antithetically, to draw a sword against those who promote doctrines not found in God's word and the confessions, and to tell them that they are sinning by staying in a church that preaches grace and works for salvation. The truth is that it is love, a love that comes only because God has first loved us.

You may say it is hateful for me to bring in Professor Dykstra or to condemn what he teaches, especially when I am no longer part of the Protestant Reformed Churches. But that is my calling and the calling of all those who have loved ones worshiping in the PRC. Christ is very clear in Matthew 10:34: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." Jesus tells us that the truth has no peace with unrighteousness, with those who are against his truth of salvation by grace alone. We must put down the lie and defend Christ and his truth. Even after three years, we must still wield the sword. Out of God's love, I hope and pray for the repentance of Professor Dykstra. We want those in the PRC to realize the apostasy of their denomination—a denomination that prates about grace to no end but really teaches a mixture of grace and works for salvation, a double offense to God! We must hate that doctrine and warn against it. Thus in love for our neighbors, we pray for their repentance and keep drawn the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

—Caleb Ophoff

## THE BEATITUDES (6): THE PURE IN HEART

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.* — Matthew 5:8

### Introduction

Jesus came in his earthly ministry preaching the kingdom of heaven (Mark 1:15). Understand that Jesus did not preach the kingdom and the gospel, as if those two things could be separated. Rather, the heart of Jesus' message, and what lies at the heart of the ministry of the gospel throughout all ages until now, and which shall continue until the Lord returns on the clouds of glory is this: the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

That coming kingdom was promised throughout all the Old Testament from the mother promise of Genesis 3:15 to the flood, to the Israelites' passing through the midst of the Red Sea, to the establishment of David's throne, even all the way until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord Jesus Christ came the first time, then the kingdom of heaven was *at hand*. You might say that the kingdom of heaven was at the door of the Jews' houses. The coming of the kingdom was realized in Jesus Christ when he came and established that covenant and kingdom by his perfect work and atoning death. The very foundation of that kingdom is built upon the perfect satisfaction of Jesus Christ, in which Christ secured for his elect the right to and the possession of citizenship in that kingdom. And that kingdom is coming. That kingdom is coming because that kingdom is Christ's kingdom. Being Christ's kingdom, it is God's kingdom. It is God's kingdom in which he has set Christ to be the only blessed potentate, the king of kings and the Lord of lords, the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

That kingdom is not a merely external and earthly kingdom, but that kingdom is the kingdom of heaven; that is, it is God's kingdom. God conceived of that kingdom from all eternity when God appointed to Christ a kingdom. The scriptures declare the very words of Jesus:

7. I will declare *the decree*: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

8. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. (Ps. 2:7–8, emphasis added)

The kingdom of heaven is God's gracious rule in Jesus Christ within the hearts of his elect church by his word and Spirit. In that sense the kingdom of heaven is to be distinguished from God's rule of sheer might in which he judges all the nations by Jesus Christ with a rod of iron. The kingdom is utterly gracious. Further, that kingdom comes every day when God by his gracious rule lays hold upon the hearts of men, who are by nature totally depraved and dead in trespasses and in sins, and breaks their stony hearts and gives to them hearts of flesh. That kingdom comes when God brings a man into saving fellowship with Christ by faith, justifying him and making him a new creature. That kingdom comes every Lord's day in the preaching of the gospel, when Christ comes in judgment, justifying his elect people and hardening the hearts of the reprobate wicked. And that kingdom shall come when God shall appear in Jesus Christ to raise our bodies and burn this old world with fire, ushering in the new and everlasting age, wherein all things in heaven and on earth shall be made one in Christ, our head.

Jesus preached that same kingdom in the sermon on the mount in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. The sermon on the mount is utterly impossible to understand apart from a proper understanding and consideration of that kingdom. Within the sermon on the mount, we see that Jesus made the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom very sharp. Christ made that preaching very sharp over against the scribes and Pharisees. At that point in Jesus' ministry, many followed him. The crowds went back as far as the eye could see, and among them were undoubtedly the religious leaders and officebearers of Jesus' day.

As I have mentioned previously, the religious leaders of Jesus' day had their own kingdom-doctrine. The

kingdom-doctrine of the religious leaders of Jesus' day was entirely transfixed on the outward appearance. It mattered very little what a man did in his private life or what a man felt in his heart toward another man. It mattered very much what men said about another man and how men judged. It mattered very little how God judged a man or woman. And you must understand that this lie is very popular today, not merely among the world of the ungodly but also in the church world. It matters very little what a man believes in his heart concerning the truth. It matters very little how a man lives his life as long as he is well-spoken of by other men.

When Jesus preached the beatitudes, he gave all glory to God and none to man. For when God blesses someone, then God declares a judgment about that one that he is righteous in God's sight and therefore worthy of everlasting life and of every spiritual blessing. And what God judges is the heart. God judges the heart. A man might be able to appear blameless and pure before the eyes of other men; but if in his heart he is corrupt, then God curses that man. Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart." Cursed are those who wash the outside of the cup but who on the inside are full of vileness. Cursed are those who are as white-washed sepulchers, who appear clean on the outside but whose hearts are full of dead men's bones. Blessed are the pure in heart.

### *Who They Are*

When Jesus declared the blessedness of the pure in heart, then he tore away all of man's outward deeds and outward appearances and got to the very essence of who a man is. That is how the word *heart* is used most often in scripture. A man is not first what he does. A man is not how he presents himself before the prying eyes of other men. A man is who he is according to his heart. Out of the heart are all the issues of life; and out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. As a man's heart is, so is that man. The heart, therefore, is man's spiritual and ethical center. Here we may make a comparison between the heart as man's spiritual and ethical center and the heart as that fleshly organ that pumps blood throughout the body. Just as the health of a man is wrapped up in the health of his heart, so also a man's heart as his spiritual and ethical center is determinative for who that man is as to his essence.

The heart as man's spiritual and ethical center is the seat of the will and emotions in man. That is why the scriptures also speak of the thoughts or motivations (intentions) of a man's heart. Out of man's heart, he desires, plans, purposes, and intends to perform all that he says and does.

With that understanding of the heart of man, we

consider what Jesus meant when he declared the blessedness of the pure in heart. Jesus did not say, "Blessed are the pure of hands" or "Blessed are the pure of lips." Rather, Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart." For something to be pure most basically means that something is unmingled or unmixed with any foreign material. When we speak of the purity of gold and precious stones, we speak of that which is undefiled by foreign contaminants and is itself one single substance, undivided and unmixed. And so, we speak of the pure in heart.

The pure in heart are not those who are judged by other men to be pure. Man can never judge another man's heart. Man can only judge based on that which a man sees. However, that is not how God judges. When God judges, he judges the heart. The standard according to which God judges is always himself. God judges the heart and therefore also declares that the pure in heart are blessed according to his own perfect purity.

Purity in God is rooted in God's simplicity. God is simple; that is, he is not a composition of parts. God cannot be divided into several different parts that make up God. No, God is simple. That God is simple also means that God is his perfections, and all his perfections are one in him. God is pure perfection. There is no division or conflict in God, neither is there any division in his perfections. God is pure love, grace, mercy, truth, and justice in himself. God is the only adorable one and the infinite and constant fullness of divine perfection.

What we say of God's perfections, we must also say about God's eternal counsel and will. God is simple. God always had his counsel with him as that which stood at the very front of his mind, as that which he beheld from all eternity as perfect in himself. Therefore, it is utterly impossible that God's counsel could ever be divided. God does not have two wills, but God has one will. God never deviates to the right hand or to the left, but he is always perfectly consecrated to himself and to the glory of his own name.

The pure of heart therefore are those who in their hearts God judges to be pure as he himself is pure. Above all other things, that a man is pure in heart means that God is the sole desire of that heart. The pure in heart have a single eye toward God and seek his glory in everything. The pure in heart are those who possess perfect love for God and perfect love for their neighbors. As the psalmist puts it, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4).

When Jesus declared the blessedness of the pure in heart, he also condemned all those who are not pure



in heart. You may not misunderstand that all men by nature, you and me included, are not pure in heart. Indeed, man by nature according to his former state of rectitude in which God created him was pure in heart. Man was not always fallen. Man in the beginning possessed a heart that throbbed with love for God and was aimed at the glory and praise of God in all the works of his hands. That was man. That was part of the glory and honor that God gave to man and by which God separated man from the animals. However, man forsook that glory that God had given to him when man fell into sin.

Man by nature, according to the condemnation in Adam, is no longer pure in heart. God is not the ruler and the Lord in man's heart, but man by nature is of his father the devil. The devil is man's lord, and sin reigns in man's heart. Man by nature therefore is the willing servant of sin, bound underneath sin's terrible bondage and held in the iron grips of sin's dreadful guilt. Man by nature has a wicked heart, deceitful above all things so much that no man can search out the depths of man's wicked heart.

You must understand too that it belongs to the wicked heart of man by nature that he is also a deceiver. Man is very good at convincing other men that he is pure in heart. Man appears before the eyes of other men to be very pure. Man garnishes himself with many pious platitudes by which he appears before the eyes of other men to have a certain esteem for God, for his truth, and for his church. And yet, the devil reigns in man's heart. Man is never one in his will or in his desires but always is divided. Man never seeks the glory and honor of the name of God to the exclusion of all other things, but man seeks his own glory and seeks to tear God down from his throne.

Therefore, the pure in heart are those in whom the ruling power of sin has been broken. Sin no longer reigns in their hearts. That is because God justified them as sinners. God does not justify the righteous or the godly person, but God justifies sinners. God justified them from all eternity when God appointed them to salvation in Jesus Christ and beheld them as perfectly righteous in him. God accomplished that justification at the cross of Jesus Christ when God judged Jesus Christ, the one man who was only ever pure in heart, who loved God perfectly, and who prayed always, "Not my will, but thine be done," to be guilty for all our vile and impure hearts. At the cross Christ suffered the wrath of God, which should have fallen upon us on account of our wicked hearts and our wicked deeds, and merited perfect righteousness for us. Therefore, on the basis of the cross, God also justifies us in our hearts by faith, freeing us from the dreadful guilt of our sins and imputing to us the very righteousness of

Jesus Christ, by which we are made worthy of everlasting life. Those whom God frees from the dreadful guilt of sin, God also frees from sin's terrible bondage. The citizens of the kingdom no longer have a heart problem. They are pure in heart.

### *How This Is So*

The citizens of the kingdom are pure in heart because God has transformed them in the very depth of their beings. The pure in heart are so because God has reached down to them by the wonder of grace in regeneration and has performed a dramatic heart surgery. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied concerning this in his prophecy of the valley of dry bones (see Ezek. 36). In regeneration God raises his people from the dead and breathes new life into them, removing their stony hearts and replacing them with hearts of flesh. Whereas formerly sin reigned and the motions of sin operated within their hearts, now God enthrones himself within their hearts and instills within those hearts new qualities and new desires. God utterly transforms those hearts, so that they hate what God hates and love what God loves.

Within those new hearts God works faith. Oh, yes, the pure in heart are the only ones who have faith. The pure in heart rest in the finished and completed work of Jesus Christ. The pure in heart rely entirely upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ for all their salvation and blessedness. The pure in heart are not those who profess faith in Christ and who also trust in themselves or in any other than Christ. All conditional theology is anathema to the pure in heart. No man can tell the pure in heart that Christ is not enough and that in order for man to be saved, there is that which man must do. Such foul and corrupt doctrine cannot proceed from someone who is pure in heart, but it is the manufactured lie of the wicked heart of man.

Then the pure in heart also mourn over their sins and turn from them daily. Only the pure in heart can do that. Only the pure in heart can truly examine themselves and confess that they by nature are conceived and born dead in trespasses and in sins. Putting aside for a moment all your imperfections and all the ways in which you fall short on account of the weakness of your faith and the sinful lusts of your flesh, if you truly love God, if you love his church and his truth, if you see your sins and more and more hate and flee from them, and if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for your salvation and cast aside all your works, then it is because God has made you pure in heart.

### *Their Blessedness*

The pure in heart are blessed. Not all men are blessed. That any man is pure in heart is itself a blessing from

God. For men and women to be pure in heart is for them to receive of the perfection of Jesus Christ, to be raised with him to newness of life, and to be made partakers of his anointing. That they are pure in heart is a gift of the grace of God by which God beautifies his people according as he has chosen them unto that glory in Jesus Christ. According to that great grace, God also crowns that gift by giving to the pure in heart this promise: "They shall see God." They shall see God because God shall reveal himself unto them.

Here the text is not merely referring to that general revelation that is common to all men. All men from a certain outward point of view see God. They see God's power and Godhead in all the works of his hands, so that they are left without excuse before the judgment of God. That is the only testimony that kind of revelation can give to man by nature. Wicked men too see God. They see God in the creation round about them, but they drown out the truth that may be known of God, holding it under in unrighteousness. Man saw God as he came in Jesus Christ in a form upon which man could lay his hands and handle him, thus challenging man as to what man truly thought of God. And man expressed what he thought of God when man nailed God to a tree. That is true of God's people too by nature. That is why Christ had to die. Christ as he was the Son of God made flesh

had to die so that all our hatred of God and all our vile-ness of heart could be forgiven.

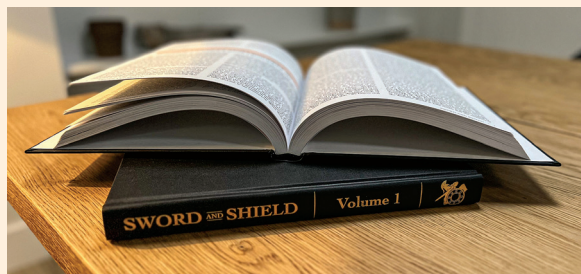
Instead, the text is referring to an entirely different kind of sight. It is a sight that the pure in heart have now by faith. By faith the pure in heart see God in the preaching of the gospel and in the sacraments, as God lays hold on their hearts and strengthens their faith. The pure in heart see God in the light of his word. And the pure in heart desire to see God. The chief desire of the pure in heart is that they might see God. They desire to see God when God shall suddenly and at length appear in Jesus Christ in the last day, when they shall see him face to face and be made like unto him, both in body and soul.

Do you desire to see God? Put out of view now all your sins and shortcomings, which God has already forgiven in Jesus Christ. Is it true of you that you desire to see God? If so, then that can only be because God has made you pure in heart. Then you are blessed of God. Then you shall certainly see God. What a glory and day of rejoicing that will be, when God's people shall see him face to face and know even as they are known of God. Such glory has never even entered the heart of man to conceive. Hallelujah, praise Jehovah!

—Garrett Varner

## Reminder to Order Your Bound Volumes

With the completion of the fourth volume of *Sword and Shield* with the May issue, the board reminds readers that it is time to order your bound volumes. Even though you are paying more for groceries and gas, there is no inflation in the cost of bound volumes this year. Bring your coffee-stained, underlined, and highlighted issues of volume 4 to the office of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) at 325 84th St SW, Suite 102, Byron Center, Michigan, or give your issues to a member of the RBP board. For those who supply their own copies but who cannot find all the issues of volume 4 or whose issues are torn and cannot be bound, the board can usually fill in a few missing issues at no charge. Just be sure to note on your stack of magazines which issues are missing. The bound volume cost using your own magazines is \$35. If you would like a bound volume of new issues, email your request to [office@reformedbelieverspub.org](mailto:office@reformedbelieverspub.org). The cost for this option remains \$45. The RBP office would like to receive your bound volume orders and your own issues by the end of July.



## DEAR SCREWTAPE

*The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and every good thing, to the utmost of their power, as murderers, watching to ruin the church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all; and are therefore, by their own wickedness, adjudged to eternal damnation, daily expecting their horrible torments.*

—Belgic Confession article 12

Dear Uncle Screwtape, Much time has passed since our former, regular correspondence, but my assignment from Lower Command reunites us again. I will try to avoid displeasing you with my infantile rhapsodies and by appearing singularly obtuse. Your warning to “bring us back food, or be food yourself” still rings in my ears.

I freely admit that I am thrilled with my current task, as I can really sink my teeth into it, and the work is far more rewarding than when I was a young fiend kept out on temptation duty for my mistakes. (Years ago, you said that I must learn to pay for my blunders; and oh, how I have paid! It is a tiresome business to provide pleasures for temptations.) To get a man’s soul and to give him nothing in return—this is what really gladdens our Prince.

I recall that you once speculated that there would come a time when we would have no need to bother about individual tempters at all, except for a few. Catch the bellwether, and his whole flock will come after him. I believe this has proven to be true. Since I have been tasked with the whole Protestant Reformed denomination, I have put that idea into practice. Thus my work has been primarily focused on her professors, ministers, and elders.

This is why I am anxious to report the spectacular wickedness displayed at the meeting of Classis East in February of this year. It was an event years in the making. (I remember your words that the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft under foot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.) Colleagues such as Glubose and Scabtree and even Spirits far deeper in the Lowerarchy had a vested interest in the proceedings and joined me in the merriment. I know our policy is to conceal ourselves, but I almost wish that the delegates could have seen us.

You are correct when you wrote that the classis did not condemn the minister or his doctrine. Quite frankly, neither he nor his doctrine even ended up being on trial that day. And I am pleased to document that the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) are still afraid to even use the words *false doctrine!* So much so, that what the classis ended up eliding from the committee’s recommendation was the *only* mention of false doctrine in the entire document.<sup>1</sup> Yet whether the PRC uses the term *false doctrine* or not, the false doctrine remains, and our strategy to perpetuate the false doctrine is perhaps even more effective due to its continuing subtlety. The most delicious part about false doctrine is that it lies about what we loathe the most, the gospel. And these lies are so inoffensive in the PRC, we have rendered the lies virtually innocuous.

Allow me to recapture some of the scrumptious affairs of the day for your reading enjoyment. I intend to be specific for the most part so that you can observe in detail the mischief that I have wrought, and I believe it is important that you know exactly what was said in order to gauge the state of the PRC. I think you will be quite pleased to note that much of what was said echoed our own fork-tongued dialect.

The morning’s work had barely begun when Rev. D. Noorman, far from condemning the doctrine taught by Rev. K. Koole, shot right out of the gate with the kind of concern we relish the most: concern for *man* and *man’s reputation*. Ha! I could hardly contain myself when he said,

When we’re dealing with a matter of false doctrine and a charge of false doctrine, we’re dealing with a man’s ministry and livelihood, and we need to have that high standard [the confessions].

1 The statement elided was the following: “Grandville correctly judges this interpretation of the statement [#2] to be false doctrine when it says, ‘If Christ’s work is what must be done for one to be saved in having the right to salvation, but good works are what must be done for one to be saved in the sense of having the conscious enjoyment of salvation, then salvation is partly by faith and partly by works.’”



I recognized the train of thought in his mind that it would be best to get in front of any issue of doctrine by reminding the assembly that poor Reverend Koole was in the hot seat, and everyone should tread carefully. You and I both understand the importance of promoting the notion that false doctrine in theory is bad, but never bad enough to risk a man's "ministry and livelihood." And I have been working hard to sow that seed in various contexts over the last several years.

I might have been slightly exasperated when the chairman, Rev. J. Smidstra, opened the morning session with the words, "We love the gospel of grace," but I need not have worried. What hollow words! *Man* and *man's reputation* were of great importance that day. So much so, that Reverend Koole, himself a visitor, never had to say a word. Delegates fell over themselves to defend him or at least to make distinctions between the writer and the words he wrote. Reverend Koole sat in the back row, crossed his arms, and watched his victory unfold. I postured myself the same. While the day might have had some uncomfortable moments for Reverend Koole, personally the day was marked as the most pleasant part of my duty thus far. Even when one delegate tap-danced around the notion that a Formula of Subscription exam is a general way to test a man's orthodoxy, not one man could bring himself to suggest that Reverend Koole be hauled up to the front right then and end the matter of whether or not he is orthodox. (Which, as even I can identify, he is not.) *Man* is god in the PRC. *Man* and his reputation rule in the PRC. All according to plan!

Speaking of a Formula of Subscription exam, I found it very entertaining that several other delegates present that day spoke such blatantly false doctrine that, were the denomination not so thoroughly decayed, those delegates too should have been subjected to the test of their orthodoxy. The absence of any exams of that nature is a testament to the corruption of the denomination. Two delegates who are personal favorites of mine, Elder Pete VanDer Schaaf and Rev. M. McGeown, demonstrated (both verbally and through their appeals) the doctrine that I have been nurturing in them for years. Some highlights were Reverend McGeown's man-centered interpretations of Canons 5.5–6, 5.9, and 5.12–13. I will not recount all his thoughts here, as he is nothing if not prolific, but I am certain you have read his delightful prevarications elsewhere.

It made not a bit of difference when Rev. J. Mahtani responded to the comments of McGeown by saying,

Words mean something...a statement like this [statement #1] is made to be true. It's not only a reasonable interpretation. It's what the statement says. That good works does [*sic*] in some sense

obtain, are means to receive some experience or enjoyment of some aspect of salvation. I know it has been said that we're not talking about justification, but *any* aspect of salvation is received only by faith alone in Jesus alone...Those who possess Jesus Christ through faith have complete salvation; they *have* complete salvation.

I say it made no difference because Mahtani prefaced his comments "by saying very clearly here that *I'm not saying* that Reverend Koole is Arminian or that the appellant is Arminian," kicking his own feet out from under himself before he even began. I think statements such as his are quite helpful to our cause, as a matter of fact, because both sides can appeal to them. One can argue that Reverend Mahtani did not condemn anyone as Arminian, and therefore Reverend Koole and his doctrine are acceptable; and another can argue that Reverend Mahtani made a stand for the truth of salvation by faith alone. But even you and I know that failure to condemn *the lie*, as they say, is to condone the lie. How amusing!

It has been of utmost importance to my work that man's reputation be elevated to epic proportions. And as I mentioned before, the delegates were very concerned with Reverend Koole's reputation. The delegates always felt obliged to qualify any statements they made that seemed to be in direct contradiction with the teaching of Reverend Koole or seemed to be against the Reverend himself, thereby making those statements less absolute.

Elder VanDer Schaaf was eager to reply:

Yes, words mean something. It is the falsification of words to construe "there is that a man must do that he may be saved" into a prerequisite: "there is something that a man has to do *to be* saved." That is to take words that mean one thing and turn them into an entirely different meaning, which was not only not meant and rejected by the person who wrote them and the person who quoted them, but which violates the meaning of the sentence...The original writer [Witsius] and the editor [Koole] who quoted the statement not only *meant* that a man must do good works with the purpose of entering into covenant fellowship with God and finally into glory, *but according to scripture that is what those words mean!*...The sentence was not careless. It was not a slip on the part of either Herman Witsius or on the part of the *Standard Bearer* editor...This was not careless language.

Just in case anyone thought that Reverend Koole was careless with his choice of words, his collaborator let everyone know that *he wrote carefully*. And I applaud

VanDer Schaaf for his bold defense of our doctrine that good works merit. I also applaud him for twisting the words of their own Book, as if that Book too teaches that man's good works merit fellowship with Him. I really could not have invented the dialogue of the day! The delegates were practically doing my work for me!

I chuckled when VanDer Schaaf sullenly complained,

The consistory of Grandville should not have characterized my discussion of these terms and my protest as either wordiness or as trying to talk the crooked straight.

But between you and me, that is a very accurate characterization. Between the amount of material related to his protest and the unbearable tedium of Pete's waxing eloquent on the floor of classis, yes, what an accurate characterization. Though, I will not complain myself. This in itself lends to our cause. Remember our old friend, the Vicar, a man who was so long engaged in watering down the faith to make it easier for a supposedly incredulous and hard-headed congregation that it was he who shocked the parishioners with his unbelief, not vice versa. I am reminded of him because Pete has so long been engaged in his—and our—cause of finding a place for man in salvation, that when he finally spoke that heresy on the floor of classis, no one was shocked or offended or called for an exam of his orthodoxy.

VanDer Schaaf then went on to say,

A statement cannot be properly understood outside of its context. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I thought that's why ministers were taught exegesis.

Now, this directly contradicts VanDer Schaaf's own dear Synod 2018; but again, I will not complain. This line of thinking I have been smuggling into the people's minds for a considerable amount of time. It allows a man to say almost anything in public, so long as he can explain it away in private. (I am sure you have not forgotten the notorious Professor Cammenga and the remarkable sentiment he preached more than twenty years ago, "Jesus Christ is not enough.")

But it pleases me to relate that VanDer Schaaf was not alone in his false doctrine. Elder Jim Lanting also strongly defended Koole:

The editor's *SB* articles were not essentially written for the average PR person. They were written against antinomians. The context, the tone, the subject matter is polemical against the antinomian view and error... What they [antinomians] essentially say, in my estimation, and I am no theologian: "Works are inconsequential; all

our works are but filthy rags; we can do nothing in our salvation; we are inactive; faith is a gift; Christ has done everything for us; there is nothing we can do; we just, as they used to say, ride on a Pullman car to heaven; works are insignificant and meaningless, and they do not please God because they are polluted with sin."

So, the editor of the *SB*, in my opinion, is opposing those heretical notions. Works are consequential; works are important; works are pleasing to God; of course, they don't earn or merit our salvation, but they are an integral part of our sanctification...

Page 189: "Works are the fruits of salvation, not causes. Salvation is by faith alone." And here is what I have double-underlined in my agenda: "This includes sanctification. It also is by faith, not by works."

And I would say, "Sanctification is by faith and 'not' by works? Works are 'excluded' from our sanctification?"

Lanting's comments might have been the most wonderful thing since the sliced loaf! While I typically prefer a more subtle approach, this man unabashedly promoted salvation by faith *and* works! He practically spat out those words, "Sanctification is by faith *and not by works?*"

And he said all this in opposition to those pesky antinomians! Now, we both understand who those antinomians really are: the Reformed Protestants. And I despise what is preached off their pulpits. So what I really enjoyed is how Elder Lanting painted those "antinomians" as believing that works are insignificant and meaningless. (Even I can attest that the Reformed Protestants do not believe that about good works. They just *refuse* to teach—infuriatingly so!—that good works have consequences regarding a man's salvation. They actually believe that His Son accomplished everything for salvation!) Lanting also ridiculed the doctrine of faith as a gift and scorned our Enemy by freely saying that it is antinomian doctrine to believe that "Christ has done everything for us." You will hear no objections from me. It behooves our cause to slander as much as possible those Reformed Protestants and the One they serve.

And the cherry atop the Lanting sundae: what then ensued were actual arguments on the floor about whether *sanctification is by faith alone!* I could hardly contain my glee! Is that not supposed to be a cardinal doctrine of any church that claims to belong to Him? That included in the order of *salvation* is the doctrine of sanctification? So much for that garbage known as the gospel of grace. Oh, how far the PRC has gone, and I hope that my efforts in this regard will not go unnoticed. As you once mentioned

to me, the PRC is “heading right away from the Sun on a line which will carry [her] into the cold and dark of utmost space.”

I have been working to bend the people’s minds back to themselves so that even in our Enemy’s great plan of salvation, they insert themselves. It is exhilarating to hear the Prince’s words on the mouths of these men. The flavor is old, vintage Pharisee. We demons enjoy distracting men’s minds from who He is and what He did, and the delegates at Classis East helped us immensely in this regard.

What I found ironic was the amount of discussion on the floor that there was not a doctrinal issue, yet most of the protests and the discussions were regarding doctrine. What was it you told me once—if something is stated as fact enough times, people will begin to believe it? Thank you for that advice, Uncle, as I believe it could be effective in this situation. Rev. Bill Langerak stated, “And the thing that also bothers me here, we talk about a doctrinal controversy, but it’s really not.”

Rev. Dave Noorman said,

We talked frequently within our committee that we enter into the work with an understanding that there is no doctrinal disagreement here. This is a matter of applying the doctrine which we all subscribe to, to the case at hand.

Ah, there is no doctrinal disagreement; it is just a matter of *applying* the doctrine. Whatever that means! Again, you will not hear one protest from me, as this all serves our purpose. The fog is so thick!

I hesitate to share the following comments of one delegate but do so only to point out that even when any smidgen of truth reared its ugly head on the floor of classis, it was of no effect. In actuality, I believe the victory was all the greater, for whatever truth was spoken lay in tatters by the end of the day. Rev. M. Kortus spoke against the doctrines espoused by VanDer Schaaf and McGeown on behalf of Reverend Koole. Kortus stated the following:

What I’m hearing is there are some who are in favor of this language, who want this language. And I don’t want this language in our churches, that there is that which man must do that he may be saved. And I do not believe that there is a falsifying of words that’s taking place here. I agree, we need to understand the statement...and we can work with Rev Koole’s explanation of it.

So there’s the question he himself proposes; the question is “done” in what sense? Is saved in what sense? That would be the context of the articles. And it’s clear that the “done” is referring to good works. I know there’s language later on

about a positive, submissive, obedient response to the call of the gospel, but the overall context is about the utility of good works. So what needs to be done? I believe the answer is good works. “That he may be saved.”

Well, he [Koole] goes on to make the distinction between the right to life and the possession of life...So he’s talking about the possession of life, and then he goes on to define that as experiencing and enjoying salvation. So if we take those different parts, Koole’s own explanations of them, you put that together and the statement reads this way: *man must do good works that he might experience and enjoy salvation*. That’s using his own definitions, his own terms: *the believer must do good works that he may experience and enjoy salvation*.

I do not believe that’s falsifying a man’s words. And I believe if we pass this, we are sending a very different message to our people than Synod 2018...I think if we adopt this, we are sending two different messages to our people about the place of good works in our salvation. I am uncomfortable with that language regardless of what aspect of salvation we are talking about... Any aspect of salvation, we receive it by faith and by faith alone. Sanctification is by faith. Preservation is by faith.

Now, I will acknowledge that these sentiments disgust me. But be assured, they disgusted many of the delegates too. For by the end of the evening, the committee’s fourteen-page document of recommendations passed, and the PRC now officially says that one can rightly explain the phrase “there is that which man must do to be saved.” Just the successful outcome for which we have been working.

If I could, I would pay a tribute to that committee. The committee and the other classical delegates raised man’s reputation to incredible heights, along with false doctrine. They toed the party line, and false doctrine and men’s reputations dominate their lives. They embraced ambiguity! And at the same time, Reverend Noorman even stated on the floor,

If you condemn an ambiguous statement, that is as much an attack on the truth than anything else. We are for the truth; we don’t want the truth condemned. That means we deal carefully with ambiguous statements.

Throughout the day men tried to appeal to both sides, and the result was deliciously diabolical. Devilishly diabolical, if I do say so myself.

And the false doctrine in the PRC has been spreading



like a disease among the members. I have induced them to enthrone at the center of their lives a good, solid, resounding *lie*. And that lie is ubiquitous in the PRC.

Professor Dykstra (that classic bellwether) has preached that when His people walk in sin, they are departing from Him and that He in His righteous judgments and wrath begins to separate from His people.

[God's] goodness is very real upon his people, and they are the ones who are waiting for him, hoping. They are the ones who are seeking him. But how does one experience this divine goodness? The answer is plain—in the way of seeking him, in the way of waiting and seeking. Now understand that God is good to his people always, always. That's evident in the cross, that God loves us and therefore sent his Son to die for us. That's evident. His goodness is clear there. Nothing stops that goodness from flowing to us. Nothing can change God's love or his mercy or his grace toward us. Jeremiah said that already: "It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed." His compassions fail not. His mercies are new unto us every morning. But we cannot expect to experience that goodness of God if we walk away from him. Walking away from God is the very opposite of seeking him. That does not make seeking God a condition; that's not what this text is giving us at all, that somehow we earn the right to God's goodness. Absolutely not. God is good and gracious to his people always, unconditionally. Nevertheless, when we walk in sin, we are departing from God and God in his righteous judgments begins to separate from us because God is good; he is holy; he cannot abide with evil; he cannot fellowship with iniquity. Someone who continues to walk in sin is departing from God...

God will maintain our relationship [the covenant], but the reality is if we refuse to seek the Lord, if we seek instead the idols of this world, if we seek instead to immerse ourselves in the pleasures of this world for our flesh, you will not experience the joys of life with God. You will not. On the contrary, you will experience his anger. That's the first twenty verses of this chapter [Lamentations 3]. You want to see the wrath of God on a believer, on believing people? This is what these verses testify. God was *angry* with his people because they were not seeking him. They were

walking in the ways of the world. That's drawing away from God.<sup>2</sup>

It is remarkable that Dykstra can preach that even though it directly contradicts that despicable Lord's Day 10 of the PRC (that nothing shall separate them from the love of God) and Psalm 73:27 in their own Book (which says that separation from Him is death!).

And even more pleasing to me is a sermon that Dykstra preached recently about how His people obtain His mercy and evade His wrath and judgment:

The text [Prov. 28:13] is saying that the one who confesses and forsaketh them [his sins] shall have mercy. And the sense is almost as if he didn't really have it in a certain sense before, but after confessing and forsaking, now he has it. Now, again, eternally God has been merciful; I know that; you know that. But this is the reality, that God shows mercy *in the way of* God leading us to confession and forgiveness, and then showing us his mercy. *In the way of*.

In the Old Testament the man putting his hand upon the animal, confessing his sins, those sins went away; they were taken away from him. And so do we know that all of our sins are imputed to Jesus Christ. Every time we confess them, they are taken off from our account, they're put on Jesus, and God says once again, "I forgive you. I forgive you." He shows us mercy. "I forgive you for Jesus' sake."

That's the only way we should ever dare to come to the table of the Lord. Do that this week. Do that every day of your life. Confess with grief. Forsake the sins by the power of God's grace, and you shall have mercy. This is God's beautiful promise to sinners.<sup>3</sup>

Distinctions, begone! I did follow your advice to me to multiply distinctions within the Protestant Reformed theology in a cunning effort to confuse the people, and my main endeavor was to distinguish between the forgiveness of sins and justification, but it appears that Dykstra ran a bit ahead of me and rid himself of the distinction here by teaching outright that imputation—justification—is by repentance! I will monitor the situation closely in the doubtful case that any members are roused by this sermon. And as you can see, the little phrase we machinated at Synod 2018 is alive and well. (Or shall I say nefarious and deadly?) Those four trivial words work deception in

2 Russell J. Dykstra, "Jehovah's Goodness to the Seeking Soul," sermon preached in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church on August 6, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=89231312457633>.

3 Russell J. Dykstra, "The Antithetical Way of Repentance," sermon preached in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church on April 28, 2024, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=429240636571>.

the sermon to denigrate the Enemy's counsel and election, leaving the people with what they are doing to be the controlling factor.

Regarding another recent propagation of the lie, I am quite happy to report that the infamous, slippery Reverend McGeown, who is ever helpful and rarely sets down his pen, has responded to a letter concerning his article in the *Standard Bearer* regarding faith.<sup>4</sup> He answered the correspondent by writing,

That union [the spiritual, living connection between Jesus Christ and the sinner], however, is *not* faith. It is a confounding of concepts to call it faith. We should reserve the language of faith for the activity of believing.<sup>5</sup>

And even *more* fiendish, McGeown wrote,

Faith is, *before it becomes an act of man*, a quality or gift infused by God. The Arminian error was not to teach that faith is an act of man—it *is* an act of man—but to teach that it is *only* an act of man and to deny that, before it becomes an act of man, it is primarily a divine gift or a power infused into man.<sup>6</sup>

Now *that* is a doctrine I recognize, as it comes directly from Lower Command, our very own Kingdom of Noise. If I were an empathetic creature, I would almost feel sorry for the man who wrote in to Reverend McGeown: there is such a thing as getting more than you bargained for!

As for the general population of the PRC, I have exploited in them the vanity that they can be complete, balanced, complex men and women who love everyone! Therefore, I take care that they see a lot of their families and friends in other denominations and keep their minds off the plain antithesis of True and False.

I agree with what you wrote to me last time, that the world's goods are a potent tool for us. I recount what you once wrote me long ago: "Prosperity knits a man to the World. It also knits a man to the False Church. His reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, build up in him a sense of really being at home in the False Church, which is just what we want." But contented worldliness is not so hard a state to muster anymore, even in Reformed circles.

Many of the people in the PRC are lukewarm and complacent, and I have made it my business to soothe them to sleep. Some are prone to faction, and it is my business to inflame them. Everything that the Protestant Reformed

person says about his or her own sinfulness is all parrot talk. Once we dismantled the doctrine of total depravity and then dusted off that trusty, old doctrine of justification by faith *and* works, at bottom, they believe that they have run up a very favorable credit balance in the Enemy's ledger!

I take care to direct all their malice toward the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). (If ever there were a bunch of tall stalks who need their tops knocked off, it is surely they!) And do not let anyone tell you otherwise; that malice is wholly real. I understand the sentiment; those Reformed Protestants make me vomit. The RPC shouts for a victory that the people believe is already theirs! They believe that their warfare is accomplished! It is maddening. We would have had them in the arena in the old days. That is what their sort is made for.

Before I conclude, please know that I have persuaded many in the PRC that the members of the RPC are unloving, intolerant, and (of course!) schismatic. In my diligent guiding of what the average Protestant Reformed member reads, I have heeded your advice to ensure that there is not an interest in reading about doctrine. That is a devious tactic you recommended, to make doctrine cold, abstract, and divisive; and I report that it is working. Long gone are the days when the Protestant Reformed man exclaimed that doctrine about our Enemy was life! We need not worry that the Protestant Reformed person is reading about right doctrine, and they would never waste their time reading what they call the *Sword and Slander*! It is humorous how the mortals always picture us putting things in their minds, when in reality some of our finest work is done by keeping things out! But best of all is to give them a grand, general idea that they know it all and that everything they happen to pick up in casual conversations about the RPC is the truth. The record office can share its findings with you: the people are steady and consistent scoffers of the RPC and the contemptible truth preached and taught there.

Also, the 2024 Protestant Reformed Synod is fast approaching. Perhaps there is a dim uneasiness for some, as there are a few appeals to the synod regarding the decisions of the February meeting of Classis East. But I am confident that the PRC will stay the course.

And where that repugnant RPC continues to plead to the members of the PRC, "Do not linger! Flee!" I continue to whisper in their ears, "Stay." A far more appealing pathway.

I will have to end this letter *in medias res*. Until next time, dear uncle.

Your devoted nephew,  
Wormwood

—Alisa Snippe

4 Martyn McGeown, "The *Ordo Salutis* (5): Saving Faith: Given to Believe," *Standard Bearer* 100, no. 11 (March 1, 2024): 276–79.

5 Martyn McGeown, "Regeneration, Saving Faith, and Union with Christ," *Standard Bearer* 100, no. 16 (May 15, 2024): 392.

6 McGeown, "Regeneration, Saving Faith, and Union with Christ," 392.





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## FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. — Romans 1:32*

**T**he mutual delight of sinners! Men delight in the corruptions of other men! Thieves rehearse together their latest crimes. Drunkards regale each other with the degradations of their last party. Men and women salivate together over tales of their most recent sexual conquests. The cleverest thief, the biggest drinker, and the most salacious tales receive the most applause as men and women feed their gargantuan and insatiable appetites for sin. Not only do men commit sin! That is bad enough. They are full of unrighteousness; and with unrighteousness proceeding from their reprobate minds, they are given over to sin and run in the way of sin. Yet more wicked than the deed itself is the delight that sinners have in sin. There is no shame! There is no contrition! The sinner loves sin for sin's sake. He loves sin even if there is no personal gain in sin for him and even if sin destroys him. The liar will lie even if he knows he will be caught because the lie tastes sweet on his tongue. And loving sin for sin's sake, the sinner desires that sin prevail in the world. Sinners have fellowship together in their sins, and they will that sin in general abound everywhere. With them righteousness and truth have no place and no fellowship. Righteousness and truth are the light that exposes the wickedness of sinners and their delight in sin. They hate the light and love the darkness.

A terrible delight of sinners! The end of their way is death. That death is not physical death. That death is hell. Death is the wages of sin, as God said in the beginning. And sinners take each other together on that way. They do not rebuke each other. They do not seek to pull one another off that terrible and slippery slope that leads to destruction. They delight to take others with them and rejoice when others join them on the path that ends in the wasting of hell.

A damning delight of sinners! They know the judgment of God! They know that those who commit such things are worthy of death. The condition of the sinner is that he is like the man who is slipping down a steep slope, being pulled by the inescapable force of gravity consisting in the judgment of God. The sinner knows this. And he enjoys the ride down. He knows this because the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. The sinner knows this because of the testimony of God in the sinner that God is angry with the wicked every day. And God gives to the sinner a living picture of death as the wages of sin in the world around him. Everyone sees that the drunkard finally exhausts his body with his drink, that the fornicator ruins his health with his debauchery, and that the thief ruins his reputation with his crimes. The direction of sin is death. Sinners know this. They know that God is. They know his eternal power and Godhead. They know that God must be glorified and thanked. And they run together in the way of perdition and not only do these things but have delight in those who do them.

Will you preach hell and damnation to the sinner to save him? He does not care. He knows already that those who commit such things are worthy of death.

The gospel! The gospel! The gospel! The power of God to salvation. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed. That righteousness of God is that saving act of God in Jesus Christ to save his people from such a terrible condition. God justifies them and forgives their sins and imputes to them the perfect and complete righteousness of Jesus Christ. And the end of all whom God so saves is life. For the just by faith shall live.

—NJL