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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CONTENTS

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Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.
—Habakkuk 2:4

The just shall live by his faith.

Blessed gospel.

Salvation now and in the final judgment belongs to the just. He enjoys the blessed life now and forever. This is his by grace alone through faith alone on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone for him and all upon whom God had mercy and whom he loved with an everlasting love. Salvation all of grace and not by works is what the text is about. Salvation all of grace and not by works at all. No mixing of grace and works; either all of grace or all of works. If salvation is of grace, then do not ever bring in works. If salvation is of works, do not ever bring in grace. Salvation is all of grace, pure grace. Such is the gospel of the text, for the just shall live by faith.

This is the gospel of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Thus the inspired writers of the New Testament quoted Habakkuk as the summary of the gospel. Paul wrote to the Romans, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (1:16–17). Over against the folly of the Galatians who had been bewitched by the deceptive doctrine of the Judaizers, Paul wrote, "That no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11). To the Hebrews the inspired writer said, "The just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (10:38–39).

The just shall live by faith.

Of that gospel we are not ashamed. It is the power of God unto salvation. Therein is the righteousness—the saving righteousness—of God revealed from faith to faith.

The *just* shall live. Who will ascend God's holy hill? The just. Who will stand in his holy place? The just. Who will abide the day of his coming? The just. Who will stand when he appears? The just. Shall anything separate us from his love? Can sword, nakedness, peril, persecution, famine, or the arts of Satan and the actions of wicked men separate us from his love? Can they be against us? No. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, and all things work together for good to the just.

The *just* shall live.

Only the just shall live.

Always the just shall live.

By faith.

The promise of God!

The divine word of the gospel that sounds among the dead! For all men are by nature entombed in death.

It was not always so. God made Adam alive, good, and in God's own image, capable in all things to will agreeably to the will of God, loving God, serving God, and walking with God in the garden in the cool of the day. For life is not merely the beating of the heart, the breathing in and out of air, eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, the turning of the mind, and the working of the body. Life is life with God. God is life. He is life in himself as the triune God. And the life of God is covenant fellowship and friendship among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—vibrant, ceaseless, eternal, unbounded life in the being of God as the triune God. Ever begetting and being begotten, breathing and being breathed, purposing, planning, willing, and searching all things, even the deep things of God. Communing with himself in love; the ocean of his divine life not the least disturbed by a ripple of disharmony. And God gave to Adam life when he gave himself to Adam as his friend and sovereign and created Adam as God's friend and servant. To know God, to see God in all the creation, to walk with God, and to serve God was Adam's life. God was Adam's life.

But being lifted up in pride and falling into the condemnation of the devil, Adam departed from God, who was Adam's life. The command of life—"do not eat, obey me, love me, love me as your all in all, live with me"—he transgressed. Adam brought on himself the curse of God and death as the just judgment for his treachery, pride, and rebellion. By the sin of that one man, sin entered the world and death by sin, so that death passes upon all, for that all have sinned! All are guilty in their head. His guilt was imputed to them. His condemnation and judgment fell on them, even those who did not sin after the same fashion as Adam. They all fell with him into the bondage of sin and death. Generation to generation man is conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins in a world that groans and travails in bondage to corruption. Generation to generation man is given over more and more to the total bondage of sin and corruption.

And what is God's judgment on the whole human race? Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin. There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who understand,

there is none who seek after God. They are all gone out of the way and together become unprofitable. There is none who does good—no, not one. Their throats are open sepulchers. With their tongues they use deceit. The poison of asps is under their lips. And their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways. And they do not know the way of peace. There is no fear of God before their eyes. The whole world is guilty before God. A corrupt stock produces corrupt offspring.

The soul that sins must die. God gives the sinner over to his sin. One sin leads to another, entrapping the sinner ever tighter in the net from which there is no escape. The sinner is a slave to sin according to the righteous judgment of God. No sin has ever passed unnoticed before the all-seeing eyes of the judge of heaven and earth. Thus all men are swept along in wickedness and sin, greed and warfare, hatred and destruction, until the measure of sin upon the earth is full. And in the earth there are floods and famines, earthquakes and disasters of every sort. Unrest and confusion reign as God visits the world in anger. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

Who will ascend God's holy hill? Who will stand in his holy place? Who will abide the day of his coming? Who will stand when he appears? If Jehovah contend with a man, who will answer him one of a thousand? If Jehovah enter into judgment with men, who can be saved?

The just shall live by faith! Like a ray of the sun that pierces the gloomy clouds, so this gospel sounds from God in the hopeless gloom and dark night of the misery of all men.

Shall live. Life is life with God, which is to enter into his holy place and stand in his temple. Life is to know the God and Father of Jesus Christ as the God of your salvation. Life is to be recreated after God's image in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. It is to be a son or daughter of God and a sibling with Jesus Christ. Life is to have the Spirit of the risen and exalted Lord Jesus Christ and to walk with God, to talk with God, and to serve God. To live in the Spirit and to walk after the Spirit of Jesus Christ is life—a life of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance, against which there is no law. Life is to have peace with the living God, to love and to serve one's covenant God, and to love the neighbor as oneself. Life is to know and to be assured that you are right with God, that he loves you, and that you are the eternal object of his unchanging favor. Life is to stand in the grace of God and to rejoice in the hope of glory. Life is to be a new creature born from above, to seek the things above and not things below. Life is to stand for God's cause in the world and for his truth in every area of life. Oh yes, in this sin-cursed world, life with God is to be the enemy of the world and to suffer its reproach; life is to know Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.

And life, this life, is everlasting. Never can it be lost. When those who possess this life lay aside their mortal flesh, death is swallowed up of life. And after they have gone into the grave and lie in the dust, they shall be summoned to everlasting life, body and soul, in heaven in a new heaven and a new earth to the endless ages of eternity. Now we are the sons of God, but it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when Jesus appears we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. The transforming vision of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: now through a glass darkly, then in perfection, body and soul.

The just shall live—*only* the just, *always* the just.

The wicked shall be condemned; and condemned, the wicked is cursed now and forever. The curse of God is in the house of the wicked, but God blesses the habitation of the just. What does Psalm 11:4–7 say? Jehovah is in his holy temple; his throne is in heaven. His eyes behold and his eyelids try the children of men. Jehovah tries the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence Jehovah's soul hates. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous Jehovah loves righteousness; his countenance beholds the upright.

Jehovah blesses the just. Jehovah curses the wicked.

The just are those about whom God declares in the judgment that he finds no fault in them and that they have kept his law perfectly. Jehovah declares that the just are perfectly righteous according to the verdict of the eternal judge. The eternal judge sits on his throne. Every man must stand in Jehovah's judgment every day and every moment of man's existence with regard to all that he does in the body, regarding every thought, every purpose, and every deed. Jehovah's judgment is according to strictest justice. He does not regard persons. About all men—Jews and Gentiles, great and small, rich and poor, male and female— Jehovah expresses his verdict, and according to that verdict he judges them. He says about every man that he is just or unjust, righteous or wicked. Jehovah makes the unjust and wicked unspeakably miserable, gives them over to their sins, and punishes them. The just and righteous he blesses with his favor and wonderful grace and assures them of righteousness and eternal life.

And what is the standard of that judgment? What expresses the awesome righteousness of God? The law, not merely as an outward code of conduct but as that law exposes the natures of all men and God's perfect requirement that man love God with his whole being out of

a perfect heart and in all that he is and does, and that he love the neighbor as himself. *Absolute perfection* is the standard of God's judgment. That is whom God will justify. That is whom God will bless. The man who does these things shall live in them.

Who then is the just? Who can be saved? Who will ascend into God's holy hill? Who will stand when he appears?

In ourselves we find that by nature we are completely contrary to God's law. Perverse! We find that God's law says, "Love," and we hate. We hate God by nature, and we hate our neighbors too. We still find in us after we are regenerated that we are carnal, sold under sin, that there is another law warring in us to bring us into captivity to the law of sin in our members. We find that we do nothing but what is polluted by the flesh. Wretched men! For God's demand expressed in the law is inexorable, unchanging, and rigorous. Against the one who does not keep all its precepts perfectly out of a perfect heart, the law delivers a terrible sentence: cursed is everyone who continues not in all things written in the law to do them. Before God's holy law no man living will be justified. Before the law all are condemned.

> Salvation all of grace and not by works is what the text is about... No mixing of grace and works; either all of grace or all of works.

There is only one just one. They killed him, the holy and just one, and desired a murderer to go free in his place. This is the gospel: Jesus, the holy and just one, was condemned, and the wicked are justified and go free! Jesus, the holy and just one, God's only begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, who is God of God, light of light, true God of true God, who was of the same essence as the Father, for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man. He came to us from God out of God's eternal love for his elect people and his eternal will to save them from their sins and to bring them to heavenly glory. He came in fulfillment of all of God's promises. Jesus came to take the place of his people, as their head to bear their sin and guilt upon his shoulders and to be nailed to the accursed cross. He entered our night and came under the law to suffer the infinite and eternal weight of the wrath of God for our sins and guilt, and so to make satisfaction to God for our sins. Jesus made that perfect satisfaction, for God raised him from the dead. He was delivered over because of our offenses, and he was raised for our justification. His righteousness is the righteousness of God, the righteousness worked out in Jesus' incarnation, in his lifelong suffering, and especially in his hellish agonies and woes upon the cross when God forsook his beloved Son. Jesus Christ loved God even from the depths of hell on the cross.

To be found in Christ—not having one's own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness that is through faith, the righteousness that is of God by faith—that man, that man alone, is just. In Christ by faith alone, the righteousness, holiness, and perfect obedience of Christ become that man's, and all his disobedience and sin-stained works are covered and forgiven. Him alone God sees and declares just.

The just shall live by his *faith*!

By his faith *alone*! Not faith and works. Faith *alone*. Faith that is God's gift to him by the operation of the Holy Spirit to engraft him into Christ his head. Faith that is the certain knowledge and the assured confidence worked in him by the Holy Ghost by the preaching of the blessed gospel that the just shall live by faith. The certain knowledge and assured confidence worked in him by the Holy Ghost that remission of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given him, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

The just lives now. He shall live forever.

Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is he to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Being justified by faith, he has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The just shall live by faith.

Behold, his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him! With a few words the Holy Spirit declares the utter wretchedness of the unbeliever. His soul is lifted up in him. He is proud. He is an unbeliever. Oh, do not think that only the proud Moabite, the proud Edomite, or the proud Chaldean is described here. It is the proud Israelite. It is the proud man of the church. He especially is in view. His soul is lifted up in him. What a disgusting description of a soul, the seat of the intellect and will.

The noblest part of man is the soul. There he stands related to God. There in his conscience the awesome judge delivers his verdict.

This soul is lifted up. Better, this soul is a festering abscess of abominable pride. What is his pride? He will be saved by his works. He will live with God because he keeps the law. He will be delivered now and in the final judgment by what he has done. Worse, he covers his wicked doctrine by a cloak of deceptive appeals to grace. Who will ascend God's holy hill? Who will stand in his

holy place? Who will abide the day of Christ's coming? Who will stand when he appears? For this cancerous soul: the obedient. Being willingly and damningly ignorant of the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, this proud soul goes about to establish his own righteousness.

So wicked that now in the temple of God this man thanks God that he is not as other men are, and he boasts of his works—all performed by grace, of course. He wears out the word *grace* to cover his wicked corruption of the gospel and to put a cloak over the oozing pride of his cancerous soul. And in the final judgment, in that great day of days, before the awesome judge, Jesus Christ, representing the perfectly righteous triune God and revealing God's righteous judgment, this wretched, cancerous soul, full of death, will boast to the Lord of all he has done for God.

Not upright is such a soul. He is never justified—not now and not in the final judgment. He is condemned for all his working. His working is the most abominable kind of working there is—a working to gain with God. That unjustified soul is condemned now and in the final judgment. There are those first vexing thoughts that afflict his soul that God has not received him. There is the testimony of the conscience that the Lord is angry with him. Under the preaching of the gospel, he is exposed, and the thoughts and intents of his heart are discerned: he will *do* to be saved! And he is shut out from the kingdom of God week after week under the preaching of the gospel. But soon—for his soul is full of pride—he silences the testimony of his nagging conscience. He becomes smug and supercilious in his self-righteousness. Assuring himself that God is pleased with his deeds, he also turns to beat his fellow-servants and to devour the weak. Confident that he is right with God and that he reclines in his wickedness in the very lap of God, he carries on in his life. Oh, indeed, the soul that is lifted up is not upright in him.

When he appears before the great judge, Jesus Christ, there will be that terrifying pause between his own boast—"Lord, Lord, did I not do many mighty works in thy name?"—and the sentence of the righteous judge, "Depart from me, you wicked evildoer. I never knew you." And that cancerous soul, so full of death, so haughty in his works, will be cast into the lake of fire, where the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die.

Because the just shall live by *faith*. By faith. By faith *alone*.

Hallelujah!

—NJL

EDITORIAL

AN ANSWER TO DEPOSITION (3)

With this editorial I conclude my answer to the Protestant Reformed Churches' suspension and deposition of me from the ministry of the word in their midst. Last time I answered all of the charges and grounds used by Classis East. This time I turn to a couple of the grounds used by Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and Trinity Protestant Reformed Church. Byron Center is the church that suspended me from the ministry, with the advice of Trinity's consistory as a more or less neighboring church. These two churches brought their judgment to Classis East to seek my deposition.

In searching for the grounds of Byron Center's consistory, one is immediately struck by the fact that one is actually dealing with the grounds of the church visitors of Classis East: Rev. Michael DeVries, Rev. Carl Haak, Rev. Kenneth Koole, and Rev. James Slopsema; and, added by the classical committee at the request of the church visitors, Rev. Clayton Spronk. The work of Byron Center's elders consisted largely of adopting documents and advice that the church visitors wrote and later that Rev. William Langerak and Trinity's elders wrote. Therefore, the grounds of Byron Center are really the grounds of the church visitors. To those grounds of the church visitors we now turn.

The Raggedy Scarecrow

The first ground that the church visitors used in my suspension was that, in my sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14, I made public charges of sin against individual consistories and ministers.

> Rev. Lanning committed the sin of public schism when in violation of Articles 74 and 75 of the Church Order he publicly charged consistories

> and ministers of the PRCA with failing to repent of the devil's theology that he claimed they embraced in the January-February 2018 meeting of Classis East and instead have minimized their great sin. (agenda for Classis East January 13, 2021, 143)
>
> Rev. Lanning committed the sin of public schism when…In violation of Articles 74 and 75 of the Church Order he brought charges of public sin against officebearers in the PRC from the pulpit rather than to their consistories. (agenda, 147)

The church visitors' charge against me simply is not true. My sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14 did not make public charges of sin against individual officebearers. Rather, the sermon was a public rebuke to the congregation of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and to the Protestant Reformed denomination for minimizing their false doctrine of displacing the perfect work of Christ. In the sermon I demonstrated the denomination's sin by quoting from its popular magazine, the *Standard Bearer*, and by quoting from public letters that consistories had written to their congregations. All of this is in harmony with the minister's calling according to the word of God and the Reformed confessions, the liturgical forms, and the Church Order, as I demonstrated in the previous editorial.

The church visitors' charge against me is a straw man. Over here is my actual sermon, which was a public rebuke of the denomination and a congregation. Over there is the church visitors' mischaracterization of my sermon, that it was a public charge of sin against individuals. This makes the church visitors' mischaracterization of my sermon a straw man—a great scarecrow stuffed full of straw to look like the real thing, but not at all the real thing.

When the church visitors proceeded to demolish the scarecrow as a wicked thing, they were not anymore dealing with my actual sermon but were only thwacking away at their scarecrow. The thing about a scarecrow is that no matter how many sticks you whack it with and no matter how you make the straw fly and no matter how much you sweat and labor in the demolishing of it, what you have demolished was only a scarecrow. So also when the church visitors gathered around their scarecrow and flailed away at it with all the sticks they could find in the Church Order, all they were left with was a battered scarecrow. They still had not touched my actual sermon, nor had they touched the public rebuke of the congregation and denomination in my sermon.

For all the fact that the church visitors' mischaracterization of my sermon was only a raggedy scarecrow, it has proved to be a very popular scarecrow. Every time my sermon came before an assembly in the denomination, the church visitors' scarecrow would come along with it. Each assembly would stuff some more straw down the scarecrow's shirt and pants and then biff away at it.

Church visitors: "In violation of Articles 74 and 75 of the Church Order he brought charges of public sin against officebearers of the PRC from the pulpit rather than to their consistories" (agenda, 147).

Byron Center: "Motion to adopt the 1st recommendation in the advice of the church visitors" (agenda, 130).

Trinity: "In a sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14, *Shepherds to Feed You*, preached in Byron Center PRC on 11/15/20, Rev. Lanning made serious public charges of unrepentant sin against ministers and office-bearers of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and against the entire denomination" (agenda, 160).

Classis East: "In these sermons he publicly charges ministers and office-bearers of the PRC with unrepentant sin" (minutes of Classis East January 13, 2021, article 37).

All the while, I have been pointing out to those gathered around the scarecrow that it is nothing more than a straw man and that my actual sermon did not publicly charge individuals with sin but rebuked the denomination and a congregation. I pointed this out in my protest to Byron Center's consistory. I pointed this out in my comments on the floor of Classis East. I pointed this out in my writing in *Sword and Shield*. For example, from my December 8, 2020, protest to Byron Center's consistory against my suspension:

> However, illustrations or warnings about a congregation's or denomination's sins must not be construed as formal charges of sin against individuals. Rather, these warnings and illustrations are part of the prophet's calling to show God's people their transgressions from the pulpit (Is. 58:1). These warnings and illustrations are part of the minister's calling to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (II Tim. 4:2). When the minister preaches the Word and reproves and rebukes a congregation for her own specific sins (II Tim. 4:2); when the minister shows God's people their own personal and corporate transgressions (Is. 58:1); and even when the prophet illustrates the sin of a congregation or denomination by quoting from sermons or documents of officebearers within the denomination (Jer. 23:16-17); the minister is faithfully fulfilling his calling. The sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14 did not bring a formal charge of sin against officebearers to the pulpit, but rather reproved, rebuked, and exhorted the congregation and the denomination with all longsuffering and doctrine (II Tim. 4:2).

In spite of this, the church visitors' straw man has prevailed as a stand-in for my actual sermon. By now it is a reflex in the Protestant Reformed Churches when explaining my deposition to restuff and rebuff the scarecrow: "He made public charges of sin."

I have written and said just about all that I can say about that, except to note this curious thing about the church visitors' scarecrow: There are many officebearers in the denomination who have indeed been publicly charging their Protestant Reformed brethren with sin. For example, the consistory of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church wrote a public letter to its congregation on June 6, 2020, regarding *Sword and Shield*. In its letter the consistory freely and openly charged me with disorderliness, schism, and lying.

> We object to the content of the editorial appearing in this magazine. We find that it lacks candor and transparency in stating the reasons for the publishing of another magazine in our denomination. No mention is made of the criticism and dissatisfaction with the Standard Bearer out of which this magazine arose. Rather, the editorial leaves the impression of a cordial relationship existing between these two magazines. This is misleading.
>
> Further, we object to statements in the editorial which allude to "the lie" present in our churches, and declaration of the magazine's intent to set aside good order in the churches in addressing this supposed "lie", even maintaining the right to "condemn" in their magazine the decisions of "ecclesiastical assemblies of the Protestant Reformed Churches". These statements threaten to promote disorder and a divisive spirit in our churches.

Several other Protestant Reformed consistories wrote similarly. And yet the minister of Georgetown church, who was also a church visitor and who himself had publicly charged me with sin, helped build the straw man that I had publicly charged officebearers with sin. He and other officebearers of the Protestant Reformed Churches all assembled at classis, having made public charges against me themselves, and proceeded to depose me for what I had not done but they had. Oh, how they flogged their scarecrow, never pausing to consider that they themselves wore the scarecrow's shirt and pants. They rolled up their own public charges into a baton and said to me, "You (*whack*) mayn't (*whack*) make (*whack*) public (*whack*) charges (*whack*)."

I can only leave that brutality and injustice with the Lord.

The Formula of Subscription Heist

The most alarming ground of the church visitors was their misrepresentation of the Formula of Subscription. The beautiful truth of the Formula of Subscription is that every officebearer who signs it vows before God that he heartily believes that the doctrine of the confessions fully agrees with the word of God. He promises to teach the doctrine of the confessions and never to contradict it. He promises to reject all errors that militate against the doctrine of the confessions and to exert himself to keep the church free from any doctrinal error that contradicts the confessions. He promises that if he himself ever comes to disagree with the doctrine of the confessions, he will not teach that disagreement but will reveal his disagreement to the assemblies for their judgment.

Throughout, the officebearer's vow is about the *doctrine of the Reformed confessions*. It is about the *doctrine of the three forms of unity*. The Formula is crystal clear on this.

> We…do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord declare by this, our subscription, that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 326)

When the Formula afterward repeatedly refers to the "aforesaid doctrine," it is unambiguously referring to the doctrine of the Reformed confessions just mentioned.

The officebearer's vow in the Formula is *only* about the doctrine of the Reformed confessions. The officebearer's vow is not a vow to abide by every decision of the ecclesiastical assemblies. In fact, the officebearer's vow in the Formula is his vow to contradict and oppose the assemblies if they ever depart from the doctrine of the confessions. This is why Herman Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and Henry Danhof were right to start the *Standard Bearer* in 1924 to write publicly against the settled and binding decisions of common grace, adopted by the 1924 Synod of Kalamazoo. Even though Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Danhof were all ministers in the Christian Reformed Church at the time, and even though their own synod had adopted common grace, their Formula of Subscription vows required them to contradict and oppose the synod in the interest of maintaining the doctrine of the confessions.

If the Formula of Subscription were a vow by every officebearer to abide by every decision of the assemblies,

it would jeopardize the doctrine of the confessions. If an assembly ever contradicted the confessions, every officebearer would be bound by his vow to uphold the assembly. His vow to uphold the assembly would bring him into contradiction with the doctrine of the confessions, which means he would be in contradiction with the word of God. It is critical for the maintenance of the doctrine of the confessions that the officebearer's vow be strictly a vow to uphold the doctrine of the confessions.

But the church visitors taught that the Formula of Subscription is the officebearer's vow regarding every decision of the ecclesiastical assemblies in a denomination. After quoting a portion of the Formula, the church visitors maintained, "The *aforesaid doctrine* mentioned in this statement refers not only to the Three Forms of Unity but also to all settled and binding decisions of the church's assemblies" (agenda, 144).

The church visitors are guilty of a monstrous misrepresentation of the Formula. The church visitors called attention to the Formula's language "aforesaid doctrine," which clearly refers strictly to the three forms of unity: the "points of doctrine contained in the [Belgic] Confession and [Heidelberg] Catechism of the Reformed churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19." The church visitors made that language "aforesaid doctrine" refer "not only to the Three Forms of Unity but also to all settled and binding decisions of the church's assemblies" (agenda, 144).

By this monstrous misrepresentation, the church visitors abducted the Formula of Subscription from the three forms of unity. The Formula of Subscription belongs to the confessions as the safeguard of the doctrine of the confessions. The church visitors stole the Formula of Subscription from the confessions and gave it to the ecclesiastical assemblies as the safeguard of the decisions of the assemblies. It was a heist, a devastating heist, that robbed the confessions of their protection and instead gave that protection to the ecclesiastical assemblies.

The result of this Formula of Subscription heist will be the exposure of the Protestant Reformed Churches to any false doctrine that militates against the confessions. As long as the assemblies have spoken, no officebearer will be permitted to contradict that false doctrine. Indeed, every officebearer will be required to defend that false doctrine as the "aforesaid doctrine" of the assemblies that he supposedly vowed to uphold.

The church visitors' heist of the Formula of Subscription is as alarming as can be for a Reformed church. When the Formula is stolen from the confessions and given to the assemblies, that church institution has already lost her battle against false doctrine and has already sold out the truth. Her officebearers should vow to defend the truth above all and against all, but she has taken the officebearers' vow for herself, that they defend her decisions above all and against all. Instead of the officebearers' being sworn to the truth of God's word as set forth in the Reformed confessions, the officebearers are now sworn to the decisions of the church's men, regardless of whether those decisions are according to the truth or the lie. Whether an assembly ever officially adopts false doctrine or not, once she has robbed the Formula from the confessions, she has already abandoned the truth.

When the church visitors stole the Formula of Subscription from the confessions and gave it to the assemblies, it was up to Byron Center's consistory, Trinity's consistory, Classis East, and synod through its deputies at Classis East to restore the Formula to the confessions and to repudiate the church visitors' heist of the Formula. And yet no assembly did so. These assemblies either approved or ignored the heist. The assemblies went even further by adding their own misrepresentations about what the Formula requires. One staggers at the dishonesty of the assemblies in this whole matter of the Formula of Subscription. One grieves at it too, for the Protestant Reformed Churches have proven themselves to be incapable of dealing honestly and seriously with the Formula of Subscription.

Byron Center's consistory adopted wholesale the church visitors' advice. The church visitors' advice: "The *aforesaid doctrine* mentioned in this statement [of the Formula of Subscription] refers not only to the Three Forms of Unity but also to all settled and binding decisions of the church's assemblies" (agenda, 144). Byron Center's decision: "Motion to adopt the 1st recommendation in the advice of the church visitors" (agenda, 130).

I protested Byron Center's decision and thus the church visitors' advice.

> My vow in the *Formula of Subscription* is not a vow to abide by every decision of consistory, classis, and synod. Rather, it is a vow to uphold the doctrine of the Three Forms of Unity. The language of the *Formula* is crystal clear on this: "We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing." What is the "aforesaid doctrine" that I have vowed to teach and defend? "All the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19…." The *Formula of Subscription*

> can not be used as proof that a man has militated against this or that decision of the assemblies, because the *Formula* has nothing to do with this or that decision of the assemblies. It has to do only with the confessions. Even when the *Formula* brings up the assemblies, it does so only in the case of a man who deviates from the confessions, not in every case that an assembly decides. (agenda, 174)

Byron Center's elders responded with a lie and further confusion regarding the Formula of Subscription.

> Rev. Lanning errs in his contention that the consistory cannot appeal to the Formula of Subscription as a ground for its charge that he is guilty of public schism (Ground 4).
>
> a. Ground: The consistory did not use the Formula as a direct ground for the charge, or proof he vowed "to abide by every decision of consistory, classis and synod." The consistory cited the Formula to demonstrate
>
> 1) the right meaning of "settled and binding" in Art. 31;
>
> 2) that it implies the minister is bound to submit to the Church Order, inasmuch as it is a creed, reformed doctrine, and based on Scripture, which vow is made explicit by the minister in the Form for Ordination. (agenda, 178)

This response of Byron Center's consistory is a lie. The truth is that the elders at Byron Center had accused me of militating "against settled and binding decisions of the ecclesiastical assemblies." The consistory had appealed to the Formula as its proof that I may not militate against the assemblies: "Rev. Lanning committed the sin of public schism, when in violation…of the vows made when signing the Formula of Subscription, he militated against settled and binding decisions of the ecclesiastical assemblies."

Byron Center's consistory was perfectly wrong in its appeal to the Formula, but it was perfectly clear that the elders understood the Formula to be my vow to abide by every decision of the assemblies.

> The…Formula of Subscription…clearly define[s] the settled and binding character of the decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies…The vow made by signing the Formula of Subscription honors the settled and binding character of ecclesiastical assemblies…The *aforesaid doctrine* mentioned in this statement refers not only to the Three Forms of Unity but also to all settled and binding decisions of the church's assemblies. (agenda, 144)

But in response to my protest, Byron Center's elders lied and said, "The consistory did not use the Formula as a…proof he vowed 'to abide by every decision of consistory, classis and synod'" (agenda, 178).

By this Byron Center's elders held two flatly contradictory grounds in the course of my deposition.

> The *aforesaid doctrine* mentioned in this statement refers not only to the Three Forms of Unity but also to all settled and binding decisions of the church's assemblies. (agenda, 144)
>
> The consistory did not use the Formula as a…proof he vowed 'to abide by every decision of consistory, classis and synod.'" (agenda, 178)

In addition to their outright lie, the elders of Byron Center confused the issue by introducing the Church Order into the Formula.

I love the Church Order, and I abide by it; but the Church Order is not in the Formula of Subscription. Anyone can test this by simply reading the Formula.

The purpose of introducing the Church Order into the Formula was for the sake of finding another way to introduce the ecclesiastical assemblies into the Formula. Article 31 of the Church Order establishes that the decisions of the ecclesiastical assemblies are "settled and binding." Therefore, so the dangerous reasoning goes, a minister who signs the Formula of Subscription is vowing to follow the Church Order, which means he has vowed to abide by every decision of the ecclesiastical assemblies. The confusion of introducing the Church Order into the Formula stands in service of the heist of the Formula from the confessions in order to give the Formula to the assemblies.

So much for Byron Center's consistory.

But what about Trinity's consistory?

As a neighboring church, Trinity had the opportunity to put a stop to the heist of the Formula. Alas, Trinity's elders and minister continued the heist of the Formula by also introducing the Church Order and by insisting that the Formula has to do with the minister's submission to the assemblies.

> In the Formula of Subscription he vowed to submit to the "aforesaid doctrine," which includes the doctrine in the minor creeds, such as the Church Order, and vowed "cheerfully to submit to the judgment [decisions] of the consistory, classis, and synod," which submission is also explained in the Church Order. (agenda, 164)

By this point the church visitors and the consistories of Byron Center and Trinity Protestant Reformed churches had well and truly stolen the Formula for their own purposes. Their grounds were confusing and contradictory, but it was clear that they viewed the Formula of Subscription as an officebearer's vow to submit to the decisions of the ecclesiastical assemblies.

All of this material would go to Classis East and the synodical deputies to be judged by them.

And what did Classis East and synod's representatives do? How did they rule on all of the material regarding the Formula of Subscription? Did they finally put a stop to the heist of the Formula?

They did not.

Classis East and synod through its deputies did not even *mention* the Formula of Subscription in their grounds to depose me. Classis East and synod through its deputies ignored the whole issue of the Formula. This was gross negligence on the part of Classis East and synod through its deputies, because the consistories of Byron Center and Trinity had come to classis and synod's deputies *on the basis of the Formula of Subscription*. The Formula of Subscription was a significant ground in the judgment of the consistories of Byron Center and Trinity. It was a ground that had convinced both consistories that I was worthy of deposition. Both consistories were asking Classis East and synod through its deputies to depose me *on the basis of the Formula of Subscription*. But Classis East and synod through its deputies said nothing about the Formula.

It was also gross negligence for Classis East to say nothing about the Formula of Subscription because a false view of the Formula has now been established as settled and binding in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The Formula has been stolen from the confessions, leaving the denomination open to any false doctrine that contradicts the confessions. And yet Classis East and synod through its deputies said nothing. By their silence they connived at the heist of the Formula. By their silence they tolerated the heist of the Formula.

This is all the more egregious since Classis East and synod through its deputies had an opportunity to put a stop to the heist of the Formula. One minister on the committee of preadvice at Classis East presented a minority report. In this minority report he competently set forth the truth of the Formula and rightly exposed the misuse of the Formula by the consistories of Byron Center and Trinity Protestant Reformed churches.

> Byron Center's application of the Formula of Subscription in connection with this sermon and subsequent sermons, as adopted in the advice of the church visitors (p. 144) and the advice of Trinity (p. 166), is erroneous. The claim on p. 144 that the "aforesaid doctrine mentioned in the statement refers not only to the Three Forms of Unity but also to all settled and binding decisions of the church's assemblies" is patently false. The "aforesaid doctrine" refers only to the doctrine of which mention is before made by the Formula, namely, the "articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19." In addition, the Formula cannot be used to interpret the "'settled and binding' nature of ecclesiastical decisions" generally (p. 166), since the context of the Formula is exclusively the Three Forms of Unity, and it strictly concerns decisions made by assemblies regarding "difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrines." (minutes of Classis East January 13, 2021, article 37, minority report)

But Classis East and synod through its deputies would not have it. They did not adopt the minority report but by an overwhelming majority adopted the advice that does not even mention the Formula.

Let the Protestant Reformed denomination take note that the false view of the Formula is now settled and binding law in the churches, adopted by two consistories and allowed by the classis and the synod.

Conclusion

The rest of the grounds of the consistories of Byron Center and Trinity are of a similar character. Throughout my deposition it became clear that the assemblies were not interested in dealing honestly or seriously with the issues. Their interest was to depose me, and any argument to hand would do, regardless of how hypocritical it made them and regardless of how it jeopardized the truth.

If anyone is interested in seeing a point-by-point rebuttal of Byron Center's grounds, I have included my protest to Byron Center following this editorial.

With that, I come to the conclusion of my answer to my deposition.

By God's grace, I say again with the apostle, "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26–27).

—AL

PROTEST OF SUSPENSION

December 8, 2020

To: Consistory of Byron Center PRC
c/o Josh Lubbers, Clerk
clerk@byronprc.com

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of our Good Shepherd.

I protest the consistory's decision to suspend me from the office of Minister of the Word of God. I ask that the consistory rescind its decision and take any necessary steps with Trinity PRC to lift my suspension and restore me to the office to which Christ has called me.

Grounds:

1. The consistory did not evaluate my sermons according to the Scripture texts that I preached. The consistory merely lifted some applications from the sermons and declared them to be schismatic according to the Church Order. However, the applications of a sermon do not stand or fall based on the Church Order. The applications of a sermon stand or fall based on the text of the Word of God. This is because the preaching is the preaching of the Word (II Tim. 4:2). The preaching of the Word includes: "That they faithfully explain to their flock the Word of the Lord, revealed by the writings of the prophets and the apostles; and apply the same as well in general as in particular to the edification of the hearers; instructing, admonishing, comforting, and reproving, according to every one's need; preaching repentance towards God and reconciliation with Him through faith in Christ; and refuting with the Holy Scriptures all schisms and heresies which are repugnant to the pure doctrine" (*Form for Ordination of Ministers of God's Word*). Because the applications are made on the basis of the Word, the consistory must evaluate the sermon and its applications in light of the text of Scripture. If the sermon and its applications are faithful to the text, then even if every single Church Order article would stand against the sermon (to speak foolishly), the sermon would still stand as the Word of God.
2. The consistory did not evaluate my sermons according to Reformed doctrine as set forth in the Three Forms of Unity. The consistory merely lifted some applications from the sermons and declared them to be schismatic according to the Church Order. True Reformed doctrine is important in a sermon in part because the reproofs, rebukes, and exhortations of the sermon arise from the doctrine and are required by the doctrine. The minister is called: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2). Therefore, the consistory must evaluate the rebukes and applications of the sermon in light of Reformed doctrine in order to judge whether those rebukes are in harmony with the doctrine.
3. The consistory's first ground for my suspension is in error, and thus it does not prove that I am guilty of the sin of public schism.
   a. The first ground reads: "Rev. Lanning committed the sin of public schism when: In violation of Articles 74 and 75 of the Church Order he brought charges of public sin against officebearers of the PRC from the pulpit rather than to their consistories" (Church Visitors Advice, p. 8, 1.a.i.).
   b. However, illustrations or warnings about a congregation's or denomination's sins must not be construed as formal charges of sin against individuals. Rather, these warnings and illustrations are part of the prophet's calling to show God's people their transgressions from the pulpit (Is. 58:1). These warnings and illustrations are part of the minister's calling to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (II Tim. 4:2). When the minister preaches the Word and reproves and rebukes a congregation for her own specific sins (II Tim. 4:2); when the minister shows God's people their own personal and corporate transgressions (Is. 58:1); and even when the prophet illustrates the sin of a congregation or denomination by quoting from sermons or documents of officebearers within the denomination (Jer. 23:16-17); the minister is faithfully fulfilling his calling. The sermon on Jeremiah 23:4, 14 did not bring a formal charge of sin against officebearers to the pulpit, but rather reproved, rebuked, and exhorted the congregation and the denomination with all longsuffering and doctrine (II Tim. 4:2).
   c. It is an error to hold that rebukes against a congregation or denomination, illustrated by material within the denomination, must be relegated only to formal charges to a consistory. If this is the case, the pulpit would never be able to expose error within a church unless a consistory, classis, and synod would first rule on the validity of that rebuke. Accusations that a congregation is given to drunkenness, fornication, spiritual

apathy, or false doctrine would all have to become formal charges to the consistory rather than rebukes from the pulpit. Over against this idea is the truth that the preaching of the gospel is also a key of the kingdom of heaven along with Christian discipline (Lord's Day 31). The rebukes of the Word of God belong in the pulpit, not only in the consistory room.

4. The consistory's second ground is in error when it appeals to my vow in signing the *Formula of Subscription*, and thus it does not prove that I am guilty of the sin of public schism.
   a. This portion of the second ground reads: "In violation…of his vow taken by signing the Formula of Subscription he militated against decision of the 2018 Synod, his own consistory and the September 2018 Classis East."
   b. However, my vow in the *Formula of Subscription* is not a vow to abide by every decision of consistory, classis, and synod. Rather, it is a vow to uphold the doctrine of the Three Forms of Unity. The language of the *Formula* is crystal clear on this: "We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching or writing." What is the "aforesaid doctrine" that I have vowed to teach and defend? "All the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordtrecht, 1618-'19…" The *Formula of Subscription* can not be used as proof that a man has militated against this or that decision of the assemblies, because the *Formula* has nothing to do with this or that decision of the assemblies. It has to do only with the confessions. Even when the *Formula* brings up the assemblies, it does so only in the case of a man who deviates from the confessions, not in every case that an assembly decides.
5. The consistory's second ground is in error when it states that my Jeremiah 23 sermon militated against Synod 2018, and thus it does not prove that I am guilty of the sin of public schism.
   a. This portion of the second ground reads: "[H]e militated against decision of the 2018 Synod." Apparently the meaning of this part of the ground is that "Synod refused to endorse these [extreme] characterizations" of the error, such as "rank heresy" and the like, and therefore it is schismatic for me to call the error "heresy" or "the devil's theology" (Church Visitor's Advice, p. 6).
   b. However, synod did not forbid calling the doctrinal errors "heresy" or the like. Synod 2018 left it up to an appellant's conscience, and thus to the conscience of all members of the PRC, whether "extreme characterizations" of the doctrinal error were necessary. The Word of God declares the extreme wickedness of walking in the lies of false doctrine. The men who do so are all of them unto God as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah (Jer. 23:14). My extreme characterization of the lie that was tolerated in the PRC is perfectly appropriate to describe the extreme wickedness of that lie. It is also in perfect harmony with Synod 2018, which said that the doctrinal errors compromised the gospel, displaced the perfect work of Christ, compromised the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and compromised the doctrine of the unconditional covenant (Acts of Synod 2018, p. 70).
6. The consistory's second ground is in error when it states that my Jeremiah 23 sermon militated against September 2018 Classis East, and thus it does not prove that I am guilty of the sin of public schism.
   a. This portion of the ground reads: "[H]e militated against…the September 2018 Classis East." Apparently the meaning of this part of the ground is: "By charging that the office-bearers in Classis East to continue to remain guilty for the wrong decisions they made, Rev. Lanning is refusing to reckon with the settled and binding decisions that Classis East of September 2018 made to acknowledge its error and conform to the decisions of Synod 2018" (Church Visitor's Advice, p. 8).
   b. However, my pointing out the dreadful evil of the decisions of Classis East February 2018 does not militate against Classis September 2018. Rather, it lives up to Classis September 2018. It says the same thing as Classis September 2018. It is good that Classis September 2018 declared the decisions of February 2018 to be in error. How is it now schismatic for me also to say that February 2018 was in error? It is exactly in harmony with September 2018 for my sermon on Jeremiah 23 to instruct the congregation in the error of what happened in February 2018 and to show the perverse wickedness of the lie.
   c. In addition, there is evidence, presented in the sermon, that the denomination through the

Standard Bearer and through the decisions of consistories is minimizing and even denying the error of the false doctrine, so that we are not living up to Classis September 2018. The Jeremiah 23 sermon does not militate against Classis September 2018, but calls us as churches not to militate against September 2018 and to live up to Classis September 2018.

7. The consistory's second ground is in error when it states that my Jeremiah 23 sermon militated against Byron Center's consistory, and thus it does not prove that I am guilty of the sin of public schism.
   a. This portion of the ground reads: "[H]e militated against…his own consistory…." Apparently this part of the ground refers to the consistory's decision requiring me to resign as editor of *Sword and Shield*. "The timing of the sermon with its negative evaluation of the PRCA and the claim that *Sword and Shield* is the only voice that is consistently exposing the devil's theology that has gripped the denomination is a thinly veiled criticism of his consistory's decision designed to undermine the consistory's credibility. This is especially evident from the fact that the sermon was based in part on the same passage the consistory used to explain their decision, viz., Jeremiah 23:4" (Church Visitor's Advice, p. 7).
   b. I have always freely acknowledged that the sermon was occasioned by the consistory's decision requiring me to resign as the editor of *Sword and Shield*. The decision revealed the consistory's opposition to my fulfilling of my *Formula of Subscription* vow to exert myself to keep the church free of this specific doctrinal error. Nevertheless, the sermon did not militate against the decision of the consistory regarding being editor, but brought the Word of God to bear on the controversy as a whole in the PRC.
   c. The ground does not prove militancy, for I deliberately did not address the consistory's decision in the sermon. The Church Visitor's Advice does not prove militancy either, but only makes accusations of "thinly veiled criticism" that was "designed to undermine the consistory's credibility." These are merely assumptions and assertions, not proof.
8. The consistory's additional charges against my sermon on II Timothy 4:1-4 are in error, and thus do not prove that I am guilty of the sin of public schism. As with the Jeremiah 23 sermon, the consistory does not evaluate my II Timothy 4 sermon and its applications from the text or from the Reformed doctrine of the Three Forms of Unity. The sermon stands or falls on the text, and cannot be properly evaluated apart from the text. Even if the prayer and sermon mean everything that the consistory says it means, if the sermon is faithful to the text, then the sermon must stand as the Word of God.
9. The consistory's additional charges against my sermon on Ecclesiastes 7:2-6 are in error, and thus do not prove that I am guilty of the sin of public schism.
   a. The consistory does not prove that my characterization of the Church Visitor's Advice is in error, but merely asserts that my characterization is wrong. The fact of the matter is that my characterization of the advice is now seen to be exactly accurate. My characterization was this: "The essence of the Church Visitor's Advice to this church is that the rebuke against our sin as a church and as a denomination of displacing the perfect work of Christ is not allowed in this pulpit." That rebuke has now been declared to be public schism, and I am suspended for it. That rebuke may no longer be heard in Byron Center's pulpit, exactly as I said.
   b. I acknowledge that the Church Visitor's Advice was private. In the first place, I did not quote the advice, but summarized the essence of the advice. In the second place, I maintain the right and duty of the pulpit to cry a warning even regarding private dangers that will scatter the flock of Christ. When a watchman is placed on the walls by being put into office, Christ gives him a position to see things that others might not see. He must cry the alarm, regardless of what rule of man he might break, lest the citizens of the city perish (Ezekiel 3, 33).
   c. The consistory mischaracterizes my warning regarding the pending decision on the Church Visitor's Advice. I did not say that no rebukes in the preaching would be allowed, but that the specific rebuke of the PRC for displacing the perfect work of Christ would not be allowed.

May the Lord bless you in your deliberations.

In Christ's service,
Rev. Lanning

Welcome to volume two of *Sword and Shield*. God be praised for giving our little publication its place in the Reformed world. And quite a place that is.

Sword and Shield begins its second year of life as the most dangerous Reformed magazine in the world. Just before this issue went to print, Rev. Nathan Langerak was suspended from the ministry of the gospel in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and expelled from the fellowship of those churches by Christian discipline. What was his great sin for which Crete Protestant Reformed Church and Peace Protestant Reformed Church sought to cast him out of the kingdom of heaven? It was this: He is an editor of *Sword and Shield*. His consistory declared the content of this magazine to be schismatic. His consistory also declared Rev. Langerak's association with me, who am no longer Protestant Reformed, to be schismatic. So grievous, apparently, is association with this magazine that a minister of the gospel in a Reformed church must be cast out of office for it, and he must be cast out of that church as though he were an unclean thing. I know of no other Reformed magazine in the world at present whose editors are being cast out of their churches for their association with that magazine. This must be a dangerous magazine, indeed.

Of course, the reality of the situation is that *Sword and Shield* was just a handy tool for the Protestant Reformed denomination to use in ridding themselves of a minister whose theological, antithetical, and polemical preaching and writing they were fed up with. Still, *Sword and Shield* was the tool they used to rid themselves of him. And now what will become of the other editor of *Sword and Shield*? Will the Protestant Reformed Churches also cast him out? And what will become of the Protestant Reformed men and women who are members of Reformed Believers Publishing, which publishes *Sword and Shield*? Will the PRC also cast them out? And what of the readers of the magazine, who month after month set before their eyes content that the denomination has judged to be wicked? Will the PRC also cast them out? These are perilous days to be associated with such a dangerous magazine as *Sword and Shield*.

But then remember what *Sword and Shield* stands for, as laid out in article II of the Constitution of Reformed Believers Publishing.

> The purpose of Reformed Believers Publishing shall be:
>
> A. To promote, defend, and develop the Reformed faith, which is the truth revealed in the Word of God and expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, with special emphasis on the truths of the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation, particular grace, and the unconditional covenant.
> B. To expose and condemn all lies repugnant to this truth.
> C. To give a theological and antithetical witness to the Reformed church world and beyond by broadcasting this distinctive Reformed truth to the people of God wherever they are found.

By God's grace *Sword and Shield* has been true to this purpose for all of volume one. No one has been able to contend otherwise. By God's grace *Sword and Shield* will continue to hold to that purpose for all of volume two and beyond. It is no sin to be part of *Sword and Shield*, and it is wrong for a Reformed church to cast men out for their witness to the truth in this magazine. Let all who are associated with *Sword and Shield* remember the words of our Lord:

> 21. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.
> 22. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.
> 23. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.
> 26. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6)

In other news, the board of Reformed Believers Publishing informs me that there have been enough donations for the magazine to continue to be mailed *free of charge* for the foreseeable future. All those who currently receive the magazine will continue to receive it at no cost.

We thank God for the generosity of our donors. Whether a businessman giving of the profits of his business or a junior high girl giving of her babysitting money, we thank you for supporting this cause in Christ's kingdom! If you have profited from this last volume year and would like to see the magazine continue, consider making a donation to Reformed Believers Publishing. Please, and thank you.

Finally, we are just about ready to publish another Letters Edition of *Sword and Shield*. Keep an eye on your mailboxes around June 15. And keep the letters coming!

May God speed the truths written herein to your heart, and the next issue into your hands.

—AL

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

REVISITING NORMAN SHEPHERD (3)

Introduction

I have begun revisiting the theology of Norman Shepherd, who was the professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) from 1963 to 1981. He was released after controversy over his doctrine of justification.

His doctrine of justification was that a man is justified by an obedient faith. The faith that justifies now and in the final judgment is a faith that is obedient—repents, obeys, perseveres—*and without its obedience faith does not justify, does not assure, and does not save*. His doctrine of justification is central to his doctrine of the covenant.

I examined only Shepherd's doctrine of the covenant made with Abraham. But what Shepherd says of that covenant, he repeats about the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant in Jesus Christ. His covenant doctrine consists of God's promise and man's obligation. The promise of God given in the covenant is made effectual in man's fulfillment of his obligation. That obligation is to trust and obey, believe and repent, cleave and persevere. The promise of God is made effectual in man's fulfilling the obligation to believe that promise and to persevere in repenting and obeying. A man does this by grace. Yet it is man's doing of these things that makes God's promise effectual. Failing to do these things, God's grace and promise fail for that man, and he falls away into perdition.

Norman Shepherd defends his covenant doctrine as honoring the absolute sovereignty of God's saving grace and the full activity of his covenant people. His doctrine *is* conditional, and he freely speaks of conditions in the covenant. Yet he does not need to use the word *condition* because his phrase that the covenant promise of God is fulfilled *in the way of* the faith and faithfulness of the covenant people is sufficient to teach that faith and its obedience, faith with its faithfulness, *is* the *decisive* activity in God's covenant. An obedient faith *is* the hinge on which the covenant promise of God turns, as it *is* the hinge on which the justification of the believer in that covenant turns. *Faith is man's decisive activity, his doing for salvation*. Obedience is man's decisive activity as the fruit of faith, his doing for salvation.

Norman Shepherd puts himself forward as a great opponent of merit, but when faith as man's activity is decisive and obedience as man's activity is decisive, faith and obedience *are* meritorious. Thus it is not unjust to say that when Norman Shepherd uses the word *promise*, he means *conditional promise*, *for that promise is not effectual unless man does something*, namely believe and obey.

My interest now is to demonstrate how Norman Shepherd applies these things to the experience of the covenant, specifically to conversion, perseverance, and assurance. I remind the reader that I am interested in the *sound* of federal vision theology. My purpose in revisiting Norman Shepherd is to familiarize the reader with that sound.

I contend that this *sound* is now being heard in the Protestant Reformed Churches in preaching and writing. This is especially so at the point of the experience of salvation. A great deal of mischief has been done in these churches by false teaching about the experience of salvation. This is being done all the while studiously avoiding the more offensive terms, such as a *general promise* and *condition*.

But as I have said, Shepherd often leaves these things out of view.

I also remind the reader that this theology—with the word *condition* or not—is subtle, soul-destroying, and church-destroying. It has come into the Protestant Reformed Churches. If it is not rooted out, it will destroy these churches. The destruction has already begun. The teachers of this false theology attack and ridicule the doctrines of grace at the point especially of the experience of salvation, caricaturing them as making men "stocks and blocks" and as being "antinomian." This false theology is a *conditional* possession or experience of salvation and the covenant.

Shepherd's Theology of Experience of Justification in the Covenant

Concerning justification in the new covenant, Shepherd writes,

> Our focus now is on the experience of justification among the people of God. How do people make the transition from wrath to grace, or from condemnation and death to justification and life? How do they get justified, how do they

stay justified, and how do they know they are justified?*

The *experience* of justification can be summarized this way: how does the believer have peace of conscience that he is right with God? Wrapped up inseparably with the doctrine of justification is the experience of justification. The experience of justification *is* justification itself, for the main sense in which scripture speaks of justification is justification in the conscience of the believer, whereby being justified by faith he has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and has the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, salvation, and eternal life. The faith that justifies is faith that *is* the *assurance* of that justification. The experience of justification is by faith without works at all. The assurance of justification is by faith alone without works.

However, for Norman Shepherd this is not the case. Concerning the *experience* of justification, which *is* justification, he writes,

> In the beginning God created human beings for union and communion with himself, for covenant fellowship. Sin separates us from fellowship with God and alienates us from him. We become hostile to God. Therefore the initiative for restoration of that fellowship comes from God himself. That is his saving grace. (80)

His explanation of the power of preaching is important because he seems to make salvation all of God.

> God comes to us with his grace from outside of us, in the preaching of his gospel…
>
> The word of the gospel strikes our ears, and the Holy Spirit accompanies that word with power according to the sovereign will and purpose of God…The Spirit drives that word home to the heart…The Holy Spirit also transforms the heart to receive the word…This is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the new birth. At the same time the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us… The Holy Spirit lives in us so that we are activated, motivated, and controlled by the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us unites us to Christ because the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ… Because we have the Spirit of Christ, we have Christ in us. We are united to Christ and belong to him. Thus united to Christ we become the beneficiaries of all that Christ has done…Specifically, we are justified—our sins are forgiven—and we are sanctified—recreated in the image of God in righteousness and holiness. (80–81)

Regarding the promise side of the covenant, Shepherd writes,

> Regeneration, justification, adoption, and sanctification represent the promise side of the new covenant, and these promises are received by faith…faith comes by hearing the word preached or proclaimed. What do we do when we preach the gospel, and what kind of response are we looking for?
>
> First, we expose the sin of sinners to whom we proclaim the gospel…Second, we tell guilty sinners what God has done for us in Christ to save us from sin, condemnation, and death… Third, we plead with sinners to come to Jesus so that their sins can be forgiven. We teach them to come in the only way they can come, in repentance and faith…When this preaching is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, sinners do respond in repentance and faith…
>
> Fourth, we teach these converted sinners to observe all that Jesus has commanded…walking the path of righteousness, the Way of Holiness… Fifth, we encourage God's people to persevere in this faith and to keep walking in the Way of Holiness no matter what obstacles, opposition, or discouragement they may meet along the way. And sixth, we assure these pilgrims that they are on the right path, and that the Lord will never leave them or forsake them. (81–82)

His presentation can be summarized this way: God takes the initiative and comes with the gospel and the promise. By *promise* Shepherd means *conditional promise* because that promise depends on man's response by grace. Man must respond by fulfilling his obligation of faith and obedience, or faith and repentance. Shepherd speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit's work is made effectual in man's activity, man's responses, or man's fulfilling his obligation. Man's activity of faith and repentance is the decisive thing on which God's promise depends and without which that promise (conditional) fails.

Norman Shepherd then more fully examines perseverance in relationship to justification:

> The Bible teaches that we are justified by faith. That is, we enter into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ…the Lord

* Norman Shepherd, *The Way of Righteousness: Justification Beginning with James* (La Grange, CA: Kergyma Press, 2009), 79. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from this book are given in text.

God forgives our sin and recreates us in righteousness and holiness…We enter into a justified state by means of a living faith [faith inseparably intertwined with repentance] and we remain in a justified state by means of a living faith…The sinner whose sin is forgiven and who has been transformed into the likeness of Christ—all by faith—perseveres in that faith and so remains in a right relationship with God.

Perseverance in faith is represented to us in Scripture as a gift from God. It is one of the gracious benefits that we receive from our union with Christ…We have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. We are "shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time"…

Of course, this promise of perseverance, like all of God's promises, must be received by faith, and saving faith is always a living and active faith. Therefore coupled with the promise of perseverance as a gift is the exhortation to persevere in faith and obedience to the Lord…

The verse that is of special interest because of its direct connection to justification is Hebrews 10:36. "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

…In verse 36 the author does not mention faith expressly, but he does mention it in both the preceding and following verses. What he expressly urges is perseverance in doing the will of God. Just as faith without works is dead, so works without faith are dead. The verse urges perseverance in a living, active, and obedient faith. The promise is that you will receive what God has promised; and what God has promised is deliverance in the Day of Judgment and eternal life—justification and eternal life…

They persevere in faith, repentance, and obedience…They receive what was promised on the ground of what Jesus has accomplished for us by his death and resurrection. (82–85)

Perseverance is in the justified state. Justification is by an obedient faith, and perseverance is by that same obedient faith. Perseverance is a gift and promise of God, *but* that promise and gift depend on man's response of faith and repentance. The promise of perseverance depends on man's activity.

Norman Shepherd then considers assurance:

> These comments on perseverance lead naturally to a consideration of assurance…The man who perseveres is in the right with God. He is justified and he will receive the crown of life…God has promised to forgive our sins, to renew us in the image of Christ, and to usher us into eternal life…That is the foundation that we have for the assurance of our salvation in the Day of Judgment. (85–86)

For Shepherd assurance and justification are inseparably intertwined:

> We get at this matter of assurance by asking the question, When are we justified?...Some say we are justified in the eternal decree of God, and that this decree is simply worked out in the course of history. Others say that we were justified when Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead on the third day…Still others say that we are justified at the moment when we are baptized, or at the moment when we come to personal faith in Jesus…Then there are those who say that we are justified really only in the final judgment.
>
> There is a measure of truth in all of these views, but the key to understanding the biblical doctrine lies in the last view mentioned. We will be justified on the day when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and when each one will receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10)…
>
> Now, again, the question of assurance is this, what is going to happen to me on that day, and can I know for sure what will happen to me? (86–87)

For Shepherd assurance is by faith, but the faith that assures is man's response to the promise by grace, and that faith is a penitent, active, obedient faith. *Faith does not assure apart from and without its obedience.*

He teaches that the basis of assurance is Christ's work:

> The basis for this assurance lies in the fact that 2,000 years ago Jesus passed through the final judgment for me and in my place…United to him by faith, I am justified in him…I know now what will happen to me in the Judgment because

of what Jesus did for me 2,000 years ago in his death and resurrection…

All these things are true: I was justified when Jesus died for me; I was justified when I was converted; I am now in a justified state; and I will be justified in the Day of Judgment…

It is essential to note that this assurance is not simply information about the future and what is going to happen in the future…It is the assurance that is given with faith in Jesus and faith in the promises that he has made to us. (88)

For Shepherd assurance is by faith, but the faith that assures is man's response to the promise by grace, and that faith is a penitent, active, obedient faith. *Faith does not assure apart from and without its obedience*:

> It is not assurance that I have independently of my response to the gospel with a true and living faith. Therefore this assurance does not stay at the same level all the time. Faith can waver; it can be stronger or weaker at some times than it is at other times. Because obedience is the fruit of faith, my assurance will rise as I walk closer to the Lord in my love for him and surrender to his will. And because disobedience is the fruit of unbelief, my assurance will diminish as I wander away from the Lord in disobedience. We must cultivate assurance of grace and salvation in the same way that we cultivate faith, namely, by attention to the word of God, by the use of the sacraments that sign and seal the truth of that word, and by faithfulness to that word. (88–89)

The verdict that we will hear in the final judgment is the same that we hear in the preaching of the gospel, which, according to Shepherd, is that those who trust and obey, believe and work, are justified:

> It is true that the judgment of the last day will be open and public. We will see the judge and we will hear his verdict. But even now in the course of our human experience the Lord pronounces his judgment, and we can hear it with our own ears…
>
> This happens in the reading of God's word and in the preaching of his gospel when God's people are gathered before him to worship… [The pastor] tells us in the name of the triune God and with the authority of Christ that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. He tells me that my sins are forgiven and that God has accepted me as his child. That is the good news of God's justifying verdict that I hear with my ears and receive by faith as the Holy Spirit drives that word home to my heart…
>
> If a sinner who hears the gospel does not embrace the forgiveness of sins promised to him there, he stands condemned. He has rejected the good news, and he will be condemned for his unbelief, his impenitence, rebellion, and disobedience…
>
> The most practical and pressing theological question we can ask is this: What is going to happen to me in the Day of Judgment? The gospel is not nearly as complicated as we might think from looking at the many heavy tomes of scholastic theology written on the subject. We are justified and saved according to the eternal plan and purpose of God. We are justified in the death and resurrection of Christ 2,000 years ago. We are now justified by a living, active, penitent, and obedient faith in Jesus. And we are sure to be justified when the ascended Christ returns to this earth to judge the living and dead. That is the good news of the gospel, the gospel we believe and proclaim. (90–93)

An Analysis of Shepherd's Doctrine of Experience

It must be remembered that all of this has to do with *the assurance and experience of justification in the covenant*. It is surely true that assurance of justification is assurance of what will happen to the believer in the final judgment. It is also true that his assurance consists in the knowledge that he is justified.

But for Shepherd there is no assurance of justification and thus of what will happen to one in the final judgment without that man's response of faith as his activity and without the works of faith, or the obedience of faith, as his activity. It is impossible for Shepherd to speak of assurance by faith *alone*, which would be justification by faith *alone*. In all his teaching of assurance, works must always come in, for assurance of justification is by an active, obedient, living faith.

Assurance by an obedient faith is no assurance at all because it casts the believer back on his own believing—faith as that which he has done for salvation—and his own obeying—working as that which he has done for salvation. Thus this doctrine vexes the poor conscience of the believer.

An application of this doctrine, then, must be made to the covenant. Federal vision theology connects justification, the promise, and the covenant of grace. For that theology the promise of God is realized in the way of faith and obedience, or covenantal loyalty.

I have been contending that there is such a presentation of the promise of God in the Protestant Reformed Churches, where the conditional covenant has been officially rejected. In essence, then, this presentation brings conditional theology, specifically Schilderian conditional theology, back into the Protestant Reformed Churches. This presentation studiously avoids the word *condition* but teaches conditions in substance.

What is this presentation?

When the presentation of the covenant consists solely in God's promise and man's covenant obligation. When the covenant is reduced to promise and demand, and without the fulfillment of the demand the promise is not realized. It is a presentation of God's promise without explicitly rooting that in God's eternal election and reprobation, which cuts across the historic lines of the covenant. It is the presentation of the promise as fulfilled by grace, meaning that the promise is given and to some degree is realized in the hearts of the covenant people, but the realization of the promise results in the *enabling* of God's people to do, will, believe, repent, obey, and persevere. And by that doing—activity—they attain to a higher, better, richer, and ultimately heavenly realization of the promise.

The promise is received by faith, and that faith is an active, living, penitent, obedient, persevering faith. It is the old, tired dirge of salvation by faith and works.

When this is connected to the preaching of the gospel, then the promise of the gospel—you will be saved—is made effectual by man's response of faith and his response of the obedience of faith. The gospel is made to depend on what man does, specifically, faith and repentance.

When this idea about the promise is connected with assurance, there is no assurance by faith alone and no teaching that faith itself *is* assurance. Assurance is by faith, but that faith is a penitent, obedient, active faith.

Over against federal vision theology, the truth of the covenant promise as stated by the Protestant Reformed Churches over fifty years ago must be asserted loudly and incessantly.

> God surely and infallibly fulfills His promise to the elect…
>
> The sure promise of God which He realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer. (Declaration of Principles, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 426)

God surely and infallibly fulfills his promise to the elect. All the life of the child of God, all his blessedness, and all his hope, assurance, grace, and glory depend on that fact. God surely and infallibly fulfills his promise. Nothing of that promise depends in any way upon the activity of man, but all the activity of man is the infallible fruit of the infallible realization of the promise. The believer has the blessed assurance of his justification and thus of his salvation and of eternal glory by faith alone. This faith does not need to be propped up by works, as though it were a weak and wilted thing. Faith is assurance, assurance that righteousness is freely given me as my own only for Christ's sake.

Along with that faith, then, is the assurance that God has elected me, that Christ has died for me, that I will enter heaven, that I stand in God's grace and have access to him through Jesus Christ, that I am the object of his favor, that he will perfect in me the work begun in me, and that he will never abandon me as the work of his hands.

The Protestant Reformed Churches can have Herman Hoeksema and his "do nothing, nothing but believe," or they will be overrun by Norman Shepherd and his "trust and obey."

I will conclude this series with a warning. The Protestant Reformed Churches can have Herman Hoeksema and his "do nothing, nothing but believe," or they will be overrun by Norman Shepherd and his "trust and obey." When Herman Hoeksema said that, he did so against precisely the same false doctrine that the Protestant Reformed Churches have faced and are still facing. Hoeksema's theology "do nothing, nothing but believe" has been ridiculed openly by his spiritual children and is being replaced with the very theology that language was intended to reject.

I have warned you. I am now free from your blood!

—NJL

Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.—Titus 2:1

CALLING ON JEHOVAH

Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD. —Genesis 4:26

According to the will of God, the Holy Spirit was pleased to put these words in scripture to declare the exercise of religion in the midst of the increase of wickedness in the fallen world under God's judgment. These words are the record of salvation by the covenant God, Jehovah. They are the fulfillment of his promise to the first parents of the human race, his promise to put enmity between the serpent and the woman and between their seeds. That enmity was not by nature at all. By nature there would have been only the seed of the serpent and no enmity among that seed. The power of sin had to embrace and envelop them all, keeping all alike in the way of depravity and enmity against God. That power and ability of sin in the entire human race could develop and grow only through the increase of the number of men and in the development of society and culture, of art and science, and of work and leisure and entertainment.

Scripture in the record of Lamech and his family demonstrates that development of the race of men in their unified enmity against their maker. The Holy Spirit speaks in the word of God of the strenuous activity of Lamech's family in certain areas of life. Among them was the realm of agriculture. Lamech's son Jabal, by his wife Adah, was renowned for his work in agriculture while living as a nomad and raising cattle. Jubal, another son by Adah, is described according to his talents in music. He developed and used the instruments of the harp (strings, likely plucked) and of the organ (pipes, sounding by breath or wind, perhaps incorporating reeds). A third son, Tubal-cain, born to Lamech by his other wife Zillah, is declared to be "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron" (Gen. 4:20–22). His particular talent was crafting and manufacturing tools and equipment, including molding, shaping, and assembling tools and equipment to accomplish further work by the sons of men.

Two elements are outstanding in this record in Genesis 4. First, we must observe that these three sons are said to be fathers with respect to their skills and crafts. They were pioneers who passed on to others the fruits of their talents and skills. Lamech's sons were respected in their distinct communities for those skills, and others eagerly apprenticed themselves to them. *Fathers* does not merely mean that they had sons whom they instructed in their particular abilities, and then that these sons took up those skills and perpetuated them in their own generations. Rather, Lamech's sons were regarded as fathers with respect to those abilities themselves as taken up by their followers. These fathers were identified according to their sons, who were "of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle" and "of all such as handle the harp and organ" (vv. 20–21).

What is outstanding in verses 20–22 is that these verses are an inspired, biblical definition of culture. These verses list bonds and ties and describe them in terms of family. Scripture declares that Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain were fathers. They had sons. These were familial bonds and ties.

However, these bonds and ties did not have the character of blood relationships. Their character was of specialized interest in and commitment to various abilities. Their character was also of talents and skills that were capable of enormous development. They were skills that had been developed and honed through generations of fathers and sons. Passed on and developed, those skills were meant to benefit the human race in many ways and in very different realms. Ultimately, these benefits were exactly the same as those enjoyed by the race of men in the present: agriculture and husbandry, arts and entertainment, and science and technology. In Lamech's three sons were the seeds of barn-building and crop-raising; of rap, hip-hop, and symphony; and of particle colliders and cell phones.

The second element we observe among Lamech's three sons is their use of what they possessed as rational and moral creatures of God. As fathers and sons in their bonds of interest and devotion to their common causes, they used the resources of the earth that God had made. They studied and domesticated animals. They dug metals out of the earth, refined and purified them, melted and forged them, and hammered and cut them according to plan and purpose. They fashioned instruments out of various materials, likely including metals, for the purpose of making stringed and pipe instruments. Further, Lamech's sons applied their intellectual powers to carry out the desires of their hearts. With the eyes and fingers given them in their creation, they trained themselves in the use of their tools and instruments to produce, to craft, and to entertain. In short, they applied themselves with all

diligence to carry on in their devices with all that God had provided.

What was the purpose of their organized societies and cultures? Why their special instruments? Why their use of the materials and abilities God had given to them?

To serve their own purposes and aims, without God and apart from him. To serve themselves in defiance of the living God. For they carried on in the way and manner of their father, Lamech, who carried on in the way of his ancestor Cain.

The father of those three sons praised and exalted himself in bold rivalry against the living God. Lamech clothed himself in garments of rebellion, bigamy, the particular vengeance of murder, and arrogant boasting of his wickedness before God. Wicked Cain had complained to God that, as he wandered as a fugitive and vagabond on the earth, whoever found him would kill him. Then God put a mark upon Cain and threatened sevenfold, divine vengeance for any attack on him. Wicked Lamech not only boasted of exercising the prerogative that belongs to God alone, but he also boasted of exercising his vengeance above and beyond God's. Lamech's boast was "seventy and sevenfold" against God's sevenfold (Gen. 4:24).

What brought about such an ungodly and abhorrent state of affairs? What gave Lamech the purpose, determination, and ability to devise his threefold rebellion against marriage, against life, and against God? What gave to his three sons their abilities in their skills and crafts and the organizational skills to see the fruit of their labors passed on and improved for generations to come? How could it be that neither Lamech nor his three sons came to be insane, raving murderers?

Should not any respondent blush with shame while stammering the answer: "Common grace"?

Rather than common grace, must not *all* grace be described by *where* it is shown?

There, far away from Lamech and his two wives, was another culture, another society. *There*, far away from the cultural enterprises of Lamech's three sons, was another culture, another society.

To follow upon the record of Lamech and his three sons, the Holy Spirit declares in Genesis 4:26, "To Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD." This declaration was the fulfillment of God's promise of Genesis 3:15 to put enmity between the serpent and the woman and between their respective seeds. In the midst of the development of sin, the faithful covenant God, Jehovah, raised up others to be his friend-servants. Their manner and way was the opposite of Lamech's and his sons'—the offspring of Cain.

This was the renown of Seth's offspring: "Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD."

Theirs, too, was a society. In their society they employed themselves spiritually. They looked not downward to the earth. They looked upward to their God. They looked about them and saw not occasions for vengeance or for developing instruments in warfare against God. They saw their plight, feeling the hatred of those who vastly outnumbered them. They saw their own helplessness in the face of the world that was developing in ungodliness around them. They knew only one refuge and only one peace: the fellowship and friendship of the living God.

They banded together. In their gatherings they bound themselves in remembrance of the God who promised to be their sovereign friend. Their activity together is expressed in the action of their spiritual friendship and fellowship. They "began…to call upon the name of the LORD."

These words record the beginning of instituted worship: coming together to pray.

With this humble, simple activity, the Holy Spirit declares the heart of covenant fellowship from the standpoint of Seth's generations. As God, their friend-sovereign, had spoken to them, so his friend-servants spoke to him. Their friend-sovereign had attached himself to his promises. In the greatness of his mercy, *he made his promises abide* in their hearts through faith according to his promise, "I will put enmity." By God's promise spoken and *fulfilled by him*, they called upon his name.

Invoking the name of their friend-sovereign, they had assurance of his abiding presence. In that constant assurance they called upon his name over and over. Calling upon God's name became their habit and practice. It became the manner by which they were identified.

Let Lamech speak his arrogant words in the exercise of his bigamy and murder. Let Jabal carry on in his craft with his sons, dwelling in tents and raising cattle. Let Jubal and his sons carry on in their musicianship. Let Tubal-cain and his sons continue in their metallurgy. Let them all carry on in their organized revolt from the creator. Continuing their crafts and skills, let them receive the praise and adoration of the seed of the serpent. What great things they could do, all apart from God, in defiance of his holiness and in refusal to glorify and serve him!

On the other hand, let this be the glory of the seed of the woman: they called upon the name of Jehovah.

The simple, humble exercise of worshiping the gracious, sovereign Jehovah is the center of true religion. By faith those men placed themselves and all their circumstances in the hand of their God.

To "call upon the name of the LORD" properly expresses the truth of worship at its heart and center.

The heart and center of worship is "the name of the LORD."

This phrase signifies not merely the truth that Jehovah has a name and that the invoking of his name brings him

near or leads into his presence for prayer and worship; but the phrase also signifies the name of God according to all its glorious truth. The name of Jehovah is distinguished from every other name in this respect: all the truth about God and all the truth there is to know about God stand always in immediate connection with his name.

On the one hand, the truth about God's name shows the great evil of wicked Lamech's blaspheming of that name in his self-praise before his wives. It is why the wrath of God is kindled against the sin of blaspheming his holy and glorious name. Calling on his name for the purpose of ridicule is the most direct attack on Jehovah's glory. On the other hand, the truth about God's name shows the great good of knowing the name of Jehovah in grace. To know God's name is to know Jehovah as the infinite, all-glorious, and wholly self-consecrated God, transcendent above all.

The name of Jehovah also signifies the truth of his revelation of himself as the God of great, unsearchable glory. Though his name is identified with the truth and glory of his infinite being, he is the one who has spoken it to his covenant people. In that revelation of his great name, he gives himself to his people to be their God forever. Their life is to know him by his name.

Those men called upon that name as the name of Jehovah. As they called upon that name, they exercised themselves in the knowledge and application of its covenant faithfulness. The God they named is the same forever unchangeable Jehovah who had spoken to their first parents after they fell into sin and allied themselves with the enemy of God. They called on that name, knowing that its bearer had graciously sought out their wayward father and mother. They invoked Jehovah's name, knowing the grace of its God who had graciously spoken a word of restoration and renewal, thereby destroying the satanic friendship with blessed enmity. They sought the gracious presence of him who had wrought salvation according to his word of promise, a word that powerfully brought them back to the everlasting happiness of salvation by their God. Upon that same name they called, so many generations afterward, understanding its everlasting power to preserve them in safety. They trusted that name to keep them safe in their God's promised enmity, to maintain them as his covenant people.

When those men called upon the name of Jehovah, they invoked him to be near them in the blessed wonder of his covenant fellowship and friendship. Calling upon his name *was* their salvation. His name was the high tower into which they fled and in which they were secure from their enemies.

Calling upon the name of Jehovah as an act of worship is also devotion and consecration. It looks beyond merely seeking and finding salvation in that glorious and powerful name of Jehovah. It represents the heartfelt, glad acknowledgment that the safety accorded by that name represents the great blessedness of belonging to that name. It means to belong to the God of that name in a most wholehearted way. This belonging is not unwilling, where the suppliant receives what he needs from calling upon Jehovah's name and then afterward withdraws in order to go his own way. Calling upon Jehovah's name finds the greatest good in being near to God in the truth of his name and being near in complete and thorough devotion. It finds all happiness and joy in knowing that name not merely as providing safety and security from hateful enemies but as the aim and goal of all life, to glorify that great name and forever to show its worth.

Consequently, calling upon the name of Jehovah represented a summary of the entire lives of the people of God, who were living antithetically to the generation of Lamech and his sons with all their worldly and ungodly cultures and works. While the wicked multiplied and filled the earth in order to subdue it for the fulfillment of their hatred against God, the covenant people of God devoted themselves to that name upon which they were calling, and they walked in grateful, heartfelt, and prayerful consecration to him. In that blessed name and unto it were their entire lives graciously bound.

Only by the wonder of that name does this same phrase, *call upon the name of Jehovah*, characterize the covenant people of God to the present day. Many generations have come and gone through the ages of sacred history. Many generations have come and gone through the ages of world history. Those generations have faced the same ungodliness and wickedness growing and developing through the same history, the advancement of the seed of the serpent in culture and society. In spite of that ungodly opposition to God and his cause, there remain men who call upon the name of Jehovah.

They know the same name as did the men of Enos' day. They know it to belong to the same unchangeable God, Jehovah. They know it to be the same glorious name, the same name of covenant fellowship, the same name that represents forever the same truth. They know it to call upon it for all their salvation. They know its seal upon them forever. They know it as the object of their worship and consecrate themselves to it with their lives. They know their blessedness to serve its glory. They are glad to hear the call to prayer: "Let us call upon the name of Jehovah."

So the words of Genesis 4:26 must continue, with men in every age calling upon the name of Jehovah. So it must continue to the end.

Because of the name of Jehovah, the covenant-keeping God.

—MVW

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL!

In your patience possess ye your souls. — Luke 21:19

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it. Whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. In your patience possess ye your souls.

Remember Lot's wife. A life she had in Sodom. Flee from Sodom she was called to do. Ran out she partially did. She looked back, longing for her former life. A pillar of salt she became, rooted to the spot. Seeking to save her life, she lost it.

Whosoever seeks to save his life shall lose it. *In ease* he seeks to possess his soul. All the calculations, all the weighing of pros and cons, all the love of ease and the praise of men, and all the clinging to the comforts of the familiar will serve only for the loss of life. Saving his life—earthly wisdom—he shall lose it.

Whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. This is the heavenly wisdom Christ teaches.

"In your patience possess ye your souls."

Jesus speaks of the last days; and, behold, it is the last days. Ever since Christ Jesus went to heaven, it has been the last days, the last hour. Thus the gospel, the church, and believers exist in the world as it were imperiled every moment. Seducers and false prophets shall come and say they are Christ, and many shall be deceived. Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Nation will rise against nation, wars and rumors of wars will terrify multitudes. Great earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and fearful sights will make the hearts of many shake.

Worse, enemies will lay hands on you and persecute you and deliver you up before the church and the world, before kings and governors. Fear not! Christ will be in your heart and mouth by his Spirit to give you an answer. And you will seal your doctrine in your persecution, a testimony that the adversaries will be unable to gainsay or resist. You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, sisters, kinsfolk, and friends. You will be hated of all men for Christ's sake and for the word of the gospel that you speak and that you represent.

In that possess your souls!

The word *souls* means lives. Imperative. You keep them. You save your lives! You do not lose them.

In your patience, brethren. Precious gift of the Holy Spirit.

Patience is endurance. It is endurance especially of suffering. Here suffering for the sake of Christ and of the gospel at the hands of those who hate Christ, the gospel, and also you for the gospel's sake. Steadfastly, in the face of the intense suffering for the gospel's sake, faith clings to Christ, to his promise, and to the hope of glory. The believer lays his soul and his life in the hand of God as his God, trusting his promise that he cares for him and that all things are for his profit.

Naturally, every man desires to possess his life in safety. He gathers to himself many arguments, many aids, many fortresses, and many defenses to keep his life in safety.

Christ here teaches a different way. "In your patience possess ye your souls." That we every day and in every way are prepared to die, to suffer under the cross. Being ready always to cast away *all* for Christ's sake.

Losing our lives, we *shall* save them!

—NJL