



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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A SURE FOUNDATION

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. —2 Timothy 2:19

The situation of the church during Timothy's time was not good. As it was then, so it always shall be for the church in the world. Her position in the world is as a hut in a garden of cucumbers and as a besieged city. Always it appears as though the church is nigh to being overwhelmed and undone. So it was then. The apostle Paul was in prison. It is always a cause of distress for the church when the men whom the Lord gives to teach and preach are taken out of the way. Sometimes this happens by disease, weakness, or death. In Paul's case it happened by his second imprisonment, and it was clear that he would not be released. The tide had turned in the Roman Empire against the church. The forces of the emperor and of public policy had been awakened to the church and were against her.

Additionally, a host of false teachers had arisen in the church, and they were turning away many from the faith and causing divisions in the church by their false teachings. Paul names two false teachers: Hymenaeus and Philetus. From 1 Timothy 1:20, we know that there was another false teacher named Alexander. Those men were acquaintances of Paul. He even may have taught them the gospel, as it was Paul's habit to teach men as he traveled on his missionary journeys. Hymenaeus and Philetus erred concerning the faith, saying that the resurrection had already passed, and they overthrew the faith of some.

Thus the ecclesiastical situation looked bleak: the apostle was in prison, and false teachers were seducing many.

It appeared that the church was hanging on by a thread.

The apostle says to Timothy, "Never mind that. Despite all that you experience and though it appears that the church will collapse, the foundation of God stands sure, having this seal: the Lord knows those who are his. And let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

This is a word of comfort to the church in every age and to the church in this present evil age of massive apostasy. This is a word of comfort to the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). The denomination is a tiny

band of churches. The whole denomination could fit in a large auditorium. It appears that the denomination could be swallowed up in a moment. There has been and there always will be conflict, not only with those outside the church but also with those who arise within the church. This has been the reality of the church's situation for all of history and in recent history, and we can expect nothing different moving forward. Over against all those things, the apostle has a word of encouragement for us.

The foundation of God stands sure!

Never mind all those things. We do not do our calculations based on what we see.

The foundation of God stands sure!

The church as a universal body and the church as an instituted congregation is secure on the foundation alone.

This is comfort for the church.

This is also a warning to the church.

There are all kinds of pressures placed upon the church and especially upon the officebearers to build off the foundation or to expand, diminish, or change the foundation of the church. Often these pressures have behind them the motivation to expand the walls of the church and thus to make the church more inclusive. That demand to make the church more inclusive undoubtedly is driven by a desire to make the church more acceptable to and accepting of various family members and acquaintances who neither know nor love the truth. In the language of the Old Testament, the people give Tobiah, the enemy of the truth, a place in the temple because they are allied with him, and they cast out the precious vessels of the truth to make room for him (Neh. 13). So the word of the text is also a word of warning: see how you build on the foundation!

The foundation stands sure, and those who stand on the foundation stand sure. They cannot be moved.

All that is off the foundation can only be and must be destroyed.

The foundation of God stands sure!

The question arises, the foundation of what?

A foundation refers to the footing of some building. When the apostle says that the foundation stands sure, he has a building in view. Before someone lays a foundation, he already has conceived of the entire building. The foundation determines the building and is the stability of the building that will be built on the foundation.

The building in view is the church. The church of Jesus Christ is a building. Sometimes the Bible refers to the church as a temple—the temple of the living God, where God dwells and takes his people into fellowship with himself. Sometimes the Bible refers to the church as the house of God, where God the Father takes his children to be in his fellowship. The church is the place where God is, where God rules and reigns, and where God fellowships with his people.

The foundation of the church of Jesus Christ stands sure!

The apostle refers to the church universal as she manifests itself in instituted churches of Jesus Christ. The apostle is saying, “Whatever happens in an instituted church, there always will be a church universal that will manifest herself in the world. A denomination can be destroyed, and God will make another denomination. A church can be destroyed, and God will make another church.”

The foundation of the church institute stands sure, being rooted in the reality of the church universal.

In the context the apostle makes clear that he refers to the institute when he says that Timothy was a minister in the church of Jesus Christ and mentions Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had corrupted the doctrine of the church. Another reference to the church institute, the house of God, is when Paul says that in every big house there are vessels of gold and silver and vessels of wood and earth.

The church institute is the church of Jesus Christ as an elect body that visibly manifests herself in the world in a local congregation. The church as the institute has membership rolls; ordained elders, deacons, and ministers; and the ministry of the word and sacraments. Necessarily and inevitably flowing from the institute is the organic life of the church—the church in her confession and as she is secretly joined with Jesus Christ and lives her whole life as church in the world, confessing the truth together, raising her children together, gathering to discuss the word, antithetically standing for the truth in a wicked and perverse world. This is the church.

The foundation of the church of Jesus Christ stands sure. There always will be a church of Jesus Christ to which we can go. There always will be a church until the very end of the world. At the very end of the world, the antichrist will be given the power, finally, to put the church institute out of existence, and we will not be able

to go to church. But until then, there will be a church because the foundation of God stands sure.

What is the foundation on which the church is built, the foundation that determines the church and is the surety and safety of the church?

The foundation is Christ!

There cannot be any doubt about that. The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone whom the builders refused but whom God made the headstone of the corner. Jesus Christ is the stone whom God laid, the stone who is precious to some and on whom God builds them as living stones. And Jesus Christ is the stone over whom others trip and break their necks; and they are ground to powder by that stone, and that too according to God’s eternal appointment of them to destruction.

Jesus Christ is the foundation.

Jesus Christ spoke of a rock upon which he would build his church. That rock is Jesus Christ himself—Jesus Christ in all the fullness of his person and works; Jesus Christ as he is the Son of God, begotten not made, God of God, light of light; Jesus Christ who as the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth; Jesus Christ who walked and talked on the earth; Jesus Christ who taught the people the truth of God; Jesus Christ as he suffered and died upon the cross of Calvary; Jesus Christ as he accomplished all our salvation, obeying the law of God perfectly and making satisfaction to God for all our sins.

Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the church. On Jesus Christ the church is built.

Jesus Christ is the foundation because he who ascended far above all heavens first descended into the lower parts of the earth in order that he might ascend above all heavens and fill all things. The foundation is Jesus Christ as he went down, was crucified, and ascended to heaven and became the Spirit. Oh, yes, Jesus Christ became the Spirit. Jesus went to heaven. He is now in heaven; he is not on the earth. He became the Spirit. There is an identification between Jesus and the Spirit. The Lord is that Spirit! Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church as he became the living Spirit, as from heaven he poured out the Spirit on his church, as from heaven he came and indwelt the hearts of his people, and as he rules them by the Spirit.

That is why the church comes into institutional form in the world. That phenomenon has no other explanation than the Spirit. This is true of the Reformed Protestant Churches. The denomination did not come into existence because it was easy. It was not easy; it was gut-wrenching. We lost all kinds of things. We would be

tempted to say that we lost everything. The denomination did not come into existence because it was the path of least resistance, but it was the path of most resistance. The Reformed Protestant Churches came into existence because Jesus Christ from heaven, as the foundation of the church, drew the church's members out of an apostate church by his Spirit. We were in a denomination that was trying to build on another foundation, a foundation that was wood and hay and stubble, a foundation that was as shaky and shifting as sand, a foundation such that whatever was built on it must be destroyed. That is all you can say about the foundation of man: it must be destroyed. All that man builds is always destroyed. We sat shaking and tottering on that foundation. And Jesus Christ, the foundation of the true church, laid hold on us by his Spirit and drew us out.

Christ drew us out in order to build us on himself, so that we might be reestablished on that sure foundation. So then we must also say that the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the truth. Or we could say that the foundation of the church is the truth as it is revealed in Christ Jesus, the truth—the truth of the gospel of the free pardon of sins; the truth of the gospel of God's absolute sovereignty in salvation; the truth of the gospel of the absolutely unconditional nature of the covenant, unconditional also in its experience; the truth of the gospel that we are righteous before God not by works or repentance but by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone because of Christ's work alone.

The truth that is in Christ Jesus is the sure foundation of the church.

Therefore, the foundation is the truth revealed in sacred scripture. Sacred scripture is the foundation of the church. Build on that, and you build on the sure foundation, Jesus Christ. Depart from that, and you depart from the sure foundation.

This means too for a Reformed church that the foundation is the Reformed creeds. We do not have to go to the Bible anew and try to figure out what the foundation is. The foundation was settled hundreds of years ago when the Spirit guided the church into all the truth and delineated in a very clear way what the foundation is. The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt are the sure foundation, for they teach Christ as he is revealed in scripture. Build on that foundation, and the church is safe, regardless of what she sees around her and regardless of what happens when she builds on that foundation. The more firmly the church is cemented to the foundation, the narrower the church is. The church will not get bigger; the church is going to get smaller. When we build on the foundation,

there will be those who say, "I do not want to be on that foundation. I do not like that foundation. I want a different foundation." Build on the foundation of the creeds, and you build on a sure foundation; you build on Jesus Christ, and the church cannot be moved.

In addition, the foundation of the creeds is the creeds as they are maintained in the Reformed Protestant Churches. We are not building on the creeds as they are maintained in an Orthodox Presbyterian church or a United Reformed church. We are not building on the creeds as they are maintained in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). The PRC corrupted the creeds at virtually every point. The PRC says, "We stand on the creeds." But the denomination does not. The PRC corrupted Lord's Day 7, which teaches that the assurance of one's justification comes by faith alone. The PRC corrupted Lord's Day 32 by making assurance to come by works. The PRC corrupted Canons 3–4.17, regarding the means that God uses to give grace, and made grace to be in the law. The PRC corrupted Canons 5.5, so that in the same way in which one loses assurance by disobedience, he gains assurance by obedience. The PRC allowed the corruption of Lord's Day 38 and the truth of the schools. She did. She allowed that. When Jesus Christ drew us out of that denomination and founded us again on him as the foundation, he founded us upon those creeds again, not as they are broadly interpreted but as they are interpreted by the Reformed Protestant Churches. That is our foundation.

If the RPC is not committed to being formed on the foundation of the creeds, then the denomination has no business being in existence. The RPC is founded on Christ, and we may say that when the denomination is founded on the creeds as they are interpreted in the Reformed Protestant Churches. Depart from the creeds as they are interpreted in the Reformed Protestant Churches, and you depart from Christ as your foundation.

There may have been those who tried to deceive themselves and others that the RPC was not much different than the PRC or other Reformed churches. There even may have been those who came with us who harbored in their minds and hearts the idea that the RPC was going to be broadly Reformed and evangelical, that the RPC was not going to stick to the creeds too much, and that she was not going to be too different from other churches.

Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church and by the Spirit, according to Christ's will to form us squarely upon himself as the foundation, brought us through controversy. That was for our good that we might be founded on the foundation, Jesus Christ. Through that controversy it has been made crystal clear that there are two ways and only two ways: one comes to the

Reformed Protestant Churches, there to be founded on Jesus Christ, or one does not come or departs from the Reformed Protestant Churches and becomes as a ship tossed on the stormy seas.

Many left the Reformed Protestant Churches. Now they sit in their living rooms, or they wander from church to church. They go back to the PRC, to the United Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, or any other church that happens to catch their fancy for a Sunday. That is ecclesiastical death. They are like ships on which the sailors have pulled in all the sails, and the ships are at the mercy of the blowing winds of false doctrine. These people have been removed from the foundation, Jesus Christ, and they have no foundation.

The foundation of the church stands sure!

All who are on that foundation are safe!

Those who depart from that foundation must be destroyed!

The foundation upon which the church is built is determinative for the church.

One cannot build a square house on a round foundation, a skyscraper on a barn foundation, or a house on a skyscraper foundation. The foundation is determinative. The officebearers and members of the church must believe that the foundation—which is the truth of Jesus Christ in sacred scripture, summarized in the Reformed creeds, and maintained in the Reformed Protestant Churches—determines everything in the church. Our feelings, wisdom, what we want, what we think is good, or what we deem expedient do not determine the church, but the foundation, Jesus Christ, determines the church. Jesus Christ determines the decisions in consistory, what we do in our homes, how we build our schools, and what we preach in the ministry of the word. Everything in the church of Jesus Christ is determined by the foundation, so that the church is a true church of Jesus Christ as she is built on the foundation, which is the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

The apostle emphasizes the foundation's surety.

The foundation of God stands sure!

The foundation's surety is behind the truth of a seal on the foundation and the truth that the foundation is of God. The foundation of God stands sure precisely because the foundation is *of God*. The sure foundation of the church is not *of men*. There are foundations on which the church can be built that are foundations of men. There is the foundation of Arminianism, so that the church becomes the product of the will of man. Man by his choice for Jesus Christ brings the church into existence by the power of man's will. The good works of man cannot be the foundation of the church. The church cannot be built upon the wisdom of man. All those foundations must collapse because they are of men. All that

is built on those foundations collapses too. The apostle gives a vivid picture of that in 1 Corinthians 3:10–11, where he says to ministers, “Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” The apostle says, “Some built on that foundation gold and silver, and some built hay and stubble on the foundation.” What happens to the hay and stubble? They are devoured by the fire in the day of judgment. If the hay and stubble built on the foundation cannot endure, then that is doubly true for all that is built off the foundation. It cannot stand. The church that is built off the foundation cannot stand.

The foundation is of God. The foundation stands fast because it is of God. The foundation cannot be destroyed. The thing built upon the foundation cannot be destroyed any more than God himself can be destroyed. The gates of hell cannot prevail against God's church because God laid the foundation of it.

God laid the foundation of his church in eternity. The apostle has eternal election in view when he says that the foundation has this seal: the Lord knows those who are his. The Lord knows them; he knows all who belong to his church. The Lord laid the foundation, therefore, in eternity in the election of Jesus Christ. In eternity God chose Christ as the one in whom God would reveal and glorify himself and in whom God especially would reveal his covenant.

Christ was first.

Christ was first before all else.

Christ was first before his people.

God did not choose us and then give us to Christ. Then Christ would serve us. We serve him. God laid an immovable foundation, Jesus Christ, in eternity when he chose Jesus Christ as the head of all his people and then as God chose his people in Christ.

God chose Christ as crucified in eternity. Yes, the foundation of the church is the cross, and Christ was crucified from before the foundation of the world! We can say that God had the whole building conceived in eternity as the building was going to be revealed in the day of Jesus Christ as the new Jerusalem, the perfect church of all the elect redeemed by Christ out of the world and descending out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband.

God had the building in view in eternity as individual churches too. There is a true church of Christ here and there because God determined each church in Christ from before the foundation of the world.

God laid the foundation at the cross of Jesus Christ, where God established and perfected his will for the salvation of his people and for the salvation and building of his church. Through all the blood and sweat and tears of

Jesus Christ, God laid the foundation. There is no other foundation for the church than the cross of Jesus Christ. There God forgave all the church's sins, established the church's righteousness, and perfected his church.

We were perfect at the cross! When Jesus Christ arose and went to heaven, we went with him. He laid a foundation, and we went right with him to heaven. We sit already in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The perfection of the church was already a reality at the cross and in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

God lays that foundation when from heaven he pours out the Spirit and heavenly graces upon his people. He is setting the church on the foundation, Jesus Christ. God is laying in the heart of his church and in the life of his church Jesus Christ as the only foundation.

That is why, regardless of what happens to an institution, the church cannot be destroyed. The foundation is in her heart. Jesus Christ is there. When an institution becomes corrupt, then Christ forms the church anew somewhere else. God lays the foundation, and God sees to it that the church that is built on the foundation, Jesus Christ, stands sure. She cannot be overcome by the winds of doctrine, by all the devil's assaults, or by her own folly and sin. The foundation of God stands sure. The existence, prosperity, and blessedness of the church does not depend on the church, but they depend upon God and the foundation, Jesus Christ, that God laid for the church.

And the foundation has a seal.

Are you on that foundation? Are you on that foundation in your hearts, so that although there are all kinds of difficulties and obstacles in your hearts, the foundation stands sure? As a church, are you on that foundation?

Serious question!

All that is on the foundation is secure.

All that is off the foundation must be destroyed!

You can know without any difficulty whether you are on the foundation because the foundation has a seal.

A foundation with a seal is a very strange way to speak. But the foundation has a seal. You can think of the seal as a builder's mark. If a man who lays concrete is proud of his work, he puts his mark in the concrete; or a builder puts his sign outside the house that he built. So God's foundation has a mark.

That mark is, first, a mark of authority. The mark is God's stamp. He says, "I rule in the church. Man does not rule there." The seal is God's signet ring that he stamps into the church and by which he says, "This church is mine. This church is safe in me. I surround this church like the mountains of Canaan surrounded Jerusalem. I am a hedge and a high tower of this church."

The seal is, second, an authenticating seal, so that the

church is not deceived about the foundation on which she stands.

What is that seal?

The seal is this: "The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Jesus Christ depart from iniquity."

Wherever that is taught, there is God. Wherever that is taught, there is Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church. Wherever that is taught, there the church is safe, regardless that the church has a Hymenaeus and a Philetus, who cause trouble for the church and overthrow the faith of some, so that many follow their pernicious ways.

The Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity!

Do you know what the apostle is saying there?

He is saying that the Lord knows those who are his in election. Wherever the theology of election is taught, there is for certain the sure foundation, Jesus Christ. The theology of election teaches that God is God. God is God in himself. God is God in all his works. God is God especially as that is demonstrated by his absolute determination of salvation and damnation apart from any consideration of the works or sins of those so ordained. Where the sovereignty of God is so taught, that God is the potter who has power over the lump of humanity to make one vessel to honor and another to dishonor, there the seal is present, and there is the sure foundation, Jesus Christ. Salvation is not of him who wills nor of him who runs but of God who shows mercy. Such a theology and truth is the seal. Because God is God who has determined the salvation of the church, she is secure in Christ, her head. This is the first part of the seal.

Notice that there is only one seal, not two seals.

We had to leave the PRC because the PRC made two seals. The PRC took the one seal and made two out of it.

There is only one seal: the Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity. This is our part of the covenant, according to the baptism form. We are by God obliged unto new obedience, namely, to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength; to forsake the world, crucify our old natures, and walk in new and holy lives. But our part in the covenant is not a second seal. It is not that God does his part, and then we must do our part, and then the foundation of the church is sure.

There is only one seal: the Lord knows those who are his, and let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

Do you understand what I mean when I say that the PRC made two seals?

The PRC said, “Yes, God does his part. God always does his part. God elects, and God saves at the cross of Jesus Christ. God even gives you his Holy Spirit, *but* you must believe and you must repent and you must obey.” The PRC made a disjunction between God and his sovereign choice and the will and activity of man. The PRC put a *but* in the text and made two seals: what God must do and does and what man must do.

The apostle says, “No, no, no. There is one seal.” The Lord knows those who are his. God chose his people before the foundation of the world. He saved his people at the cross of Jesus Christ, and God so bestows on his people their salvation that they name the name of Christ.

That is faith. His people confess Jesus Christ, and they cleave to him with all their hearts. And cleaving unto him, they depart from iniquity, not as that which man does alongside God but as that which man does as fruit, and only fruit, because the Lord knows those who are his.

That is the seal of the foundation.

If you are taught the absolute sovereignty of God; that God fulfills his promise; and that as the fruit of that and the work of God’s grace in the hearts and lives of his people, they cleave to their God and hate the world, that is the truth. That is the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. And that is the truth that is the church’s sure foundation.

—NJL

FROM THE EDITOR

In your hands is another packed issue of *Sword and Shield*. We continue to hope that you find the writing informative and instructive.

You will notice a guest editorial that takes up the important question of whether we are instruments in God’s hands or parties with the living God in the covenant of grace. The Protestant Reformed ministers are busy developing their doctrine of the mutuality of the covenant in which man by grace becomes a party with the living God. It is a conditional and bilateral covenant in which God and man together fulfill the promise of the covenant.

Reverend Pascual continues his enlightening series on what happened in the Philippine churches. A lot of shenanigans, for one. The Reformed Protestant denomination was dealing with a huckster, and the denomination was his mark, as the Protestant Reformed denomination had been his mark prior to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches. The Reformed Protestant readership should have a vital interest in

these articles. They are the first bit of real information written by a former member of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines who was involved in the events. We hope his articles contribute to the decision of the Reformed Protestant members regarding a possible sister-church relationship with First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church. A sister-church relationship must be organic and thus arise out of the churches and not be imposed on the churches after closed-door meetings of the leaders.

The *Running Footmen* contribution this month comes from Aaron Cleveland. He writes on the much hated but crucial doctrine of the antithesis. We love the doctrine of the covenant of grace; and without the truth of the antithesis, there can be no true covenant doctrine.

For the rest, you know the cast of characters, and they continue to produce for our magazine and for your edification sound Reformed material to refresh and expand the soul.

—NJL

INSTRUMENT OR PARTY?

The controversy of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) with the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), in essence, is the PRC's rejection of the truth that the believer is an instrument in the hands of the living God. Whether the Protestant Reformed ministers and professors admit it or not, they make man a party with God in salvation.

This article will show that the truth of the believer as an instrument was the teaching of our spiritual forefathers in the PRC, especially of Rev. Herman Hoeksema, and that this truth was also held by the church of the past.

What does it mean that the believer is an instrument? It is to confess that every detail of the life of the believer has been determined by God and that God in his sovereignty over the believer works all things in his life to the glory of God's name. This is especially evident when it comes to the spiritual life of the believer. The believer is called to a life of thankfulness before God, and the believer shows this thankfulness in love for God and the neighbor.

The command of God to the believer is "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). However, the question is, how can the believer who is totally depraved by nature work out his own salvation? Verse 13 answers that for us. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This text is very clear. It is God who works both the willing and the doing in a man.

Why is it, then, that man does not want to be an instrument in the hands of God? Because man is proud by nature, and he wants to be a party with the living God. It is the age-old problem that man wants to be God.

Now, make no mistake. The believer has a part, but he is not a party. Rev. Herman Hoeksema made this clear when he taught the following in a sermon on Lord's Day 11:

You know the baptism form is so beautiful, beloved...And then comes our part. Yes, our part. Not our party. And, beloved, there are people who also do not understand this, and they

say this: "I believe that Jesus is a complete savior for us. I believe that he is a complete savior within us; but now when it's finished, now comes our part." And then they say, "But we must do this: that we walk in a new and holy life and bear fruits of thankfulness. That's for us." Well, beloved, those that say so are still Arminian, still do not understand the truth. Because the truth is this: that Jesus also bears the fruit. And that we are privileged to be *instrumental* in showing forth the fruits of Jesus Christ in our lives—that's our privilege. That's the truth. Jesus for us. Jesus in us. And Jesus through us...It's all of God and none of us. That's salvation, beloved.¹

Dr. Abraham Kuyper also taught that the believer is an instrument in the hands of God:

On the basis of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice, the Reformed church teaches a particular grace by which Jesus directs life, blesses the Word, opens the ear, *and bends the will*, but—and everything is dependent upon this—as *instrument*, so that he remains *the one who does it*, and the one to whom, therefore, is all the glory!²

One's understanding of Philippians 2:12–13 is fundamental to a proper understanding of man's relationship to God in salvation. Unbelief always shows itself in this specific area of salvation. How is God sovereign and man responsible? The argument is that because man is a moral, rational creature, he must do something for salvation or the experience of salvation. This is the theology being taught in the PRC; and at this juncture, one is either biblical and Reformed or Arminian and Pelagian.

The teachings of our spiritual forefathers in the PRC were that the whole of salvation is of and by the sovereign grace of God. Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote this:

Thus He worketh within us to will and to do of His good pleasure. This, however, does not

1 Herman Hoeksema, "Jesus, the Complete Savior," sermon preached on September 25, 1955, https://oldpathsrecordings.com/wp-content/uploads/sermons/2020/09/13-LD-11-Jesus-the-Complete-Savior-9_25_55.mp3, emphasis added.

2 Abraham Kuyper, *Particular Grace: A Defense of God's Sovereignty in Salvation*, trans. Marvin Kamps (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001), 98.

mean whatsoever that in establishing His covenant God deals with us as stocks and blocks. He always treats us as His moral, rational creatures. And therefore, in the covenant we are responsible for our part. But even this responsibility of the Christian does not stand in juxtaposition, next to, or over against the counsel of God. Nor is the relation such that the fulfillment of our part of the covenant is a prerequisite or condition for God's fulfilling His part. Man's freedom is never sovereign. And therefore the part which the child of God fulfills in the covenant is fruit of the part which God fulfills. God is first, and man follows. He works within us to will and to do of His good pleasure; and as a fruit we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.³

And Rev. George Ophoff wrote the following regarding the phrase "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling":

In other words, believe in God through Christ, crucify your members which are upon the earth and put on Christ, *because* it is God who, by imparting unto you the life of Christ and working in you both to will and to do, *makes you* to believe in God through Christ. *Desire* and *will* to walk in every good work and do walk in them actually, *because* it is God who maketh you so to desire, will and do. He worketh in you both to will and to do.⁴

God is always first! Man does and only can follow God's work of salvation in man. Everything that the believer does is fruit and nothing more. This is because God's sovereign grace is a power that works effectually in the believer's life. Man is an instrument in the hands of God. Anyone who maintains that man is first denies God's sovereignty.

What is being taught in the PRC is that there are conditions and prerequisites that one must fulfill *before* he has salvation or the experience of salvation. This is Rev. Ken Koole's teaching:

I say again, "If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do" . . . For *until* a man responds to the truth and call of the gospel by believing it, confessing it, he is not, and cannot be saved.⁵

There is also Reverend Koole's "available-grace" doctrine.⁶ And now Peter VanDer Schaaf is teaching

that God sovereignly works with His rational and moral elect that they experience His delight in a sequence of time and experience, in an organic way in which there is a *mutuality* of grace, obedience, and gracious reward.⁷

All this teaching is rooted in a man-first theology or a cooperation of God and man in salvation. This honors man as a moral, rational creature. I am reminded of the words of Prof. Homer Hoeksema:

It is indeed passing strange that man will grant that the existence and activity of a stone or a tree or any other brute creature can be subject to God's sovereign control and direction, but that a man, just because he is a creature with mind and will, cannot be subject to such sovereign control and direction of the Almighty.⁸

What did the early church fathers believe about Philippians 2:12–13 and how God works in the believer? Augustine taught the following:

We have to ask God that we may will as much as is sufficient for us to act willingly. It is indeed certain that it is we who will when we will, but it is he who causes us to will the good. It is indeed certain that it is we who act when we act, but it is he who, by providing the will with fully effective powers, causes us to act, as he says: I will cause you to walk in my commandments.⁹

In answer to his rival Pighius, Calvin wrote the following regarding the apostle Paul's words in Philippians 2:13:

In response to Paul's statement that it is God who works in us both to will and to do

3 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 3:22.

4 G. M. Ophoff, "The Gospel and the Command," *Standard Bearer* 29, no. 1 (October 1, 1952): 23.

5 Kenneth Koole, "Letters: Response," *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 11 (March 1, 2019): 254.

6 Kenneth Koole, "Manna from Heaven," sermon preached in at least twelve Protestant Reformed churches from September 6, 2020, to August 8, 2021, with virtually no objections.

7 Peter VanDer Schaaf, letter to Grandville [Protestant Reformed Church], dated August 15, 2022, in appeal to Classis East, 96–97; Nathan J. Langerak, "Pete Won! Now What?," *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 7 (December 1, 2023): 11–12, emphasis added.

8 Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers: An Exposition of the Canons of Dordrecht* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 553.

9 Quoted in John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*, ed. A. N. S. Lane, trans. G. I. Davies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 123.

according to his good pleasure, he [Pighius] says that he too affirms this, but in such a way that the [human] will acts as well. With this twist he thinks that he has escaped, when I still have him held tight around the waist. For the question is not whether the will acts—which is beyond doubt—but whether it acts of itself or according to the measure of God’s action. Or (to use, if I may, a cruder expression) whether the action of the will is distinct and separate from the working of God or, as people say, subject to it. For who is not aware that it is by means of the will that man wills? But Paul is affirming in that passage that the will is directed by the Spirit of God to turn to the good and seek after it, and so any good which we conceive in our minds is [God’s] own doing. Therefore, Pighius’s answer is a puff of smoke.¹⁰

This is also the instruction of scripture. For example, in Psalm 143:8–11 the psalmist wrote, “Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness...cause me to know the way wherein I should walk...Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies...Teach me to do thy will...lead me into the land of uprightness. Quicken me, O LORD, for thy name’s sake” (emphasis added). The psalmist confessed that salvation in all aspects is completely the Lord’s work in him. We read in Jeremiah 31:18–19 regarding repentance, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented” (emphasis added). God must turn the sinner, or the sinner will never turn unto the Lord in repentance. Of himself the sinner can do nothing that is pleasing to God. As an instrument the sinner is totally and completely dependent upon God.

John Calvin wonderfully summarized this whole matter:

The psalmist says, “I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes alway” (Ps 119:112); meaning, that with willing and cheerful readiness of mind he had devoted himself to God. He does not boast, however, that he was the author of that disposition, for in the same psalm he acknowledges it to be the gift of God. We must, therefore, attend to the admonition of Paul, when he thus addresses believers, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of

his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12, 13). He ascribes to them a part in acting that they may not indulge in carnal sloth, but by enjoining fear and trembling, he humbles them so as to keep them in remembrance, that the very thing, which they are ordered to do is the proper work of God—distinctly intimating, that believers act (if I may so speak) passively inasmuch as the power is given them from heaven, and cannot in any way be arrogated to themselves.¹¹

That Calvin used the term “passively” is very striking. Obviously, Calvin was emphasizing that the entire work of salvation is of God. It is one-sided! This does not deny that the believer is active, as Calvin stated about David: “With willing and cheerful readiness of mind he had devoted himself to God.” But the believer is always made a willing instrument by the power of God’s sovereign, irresistible grace. It is always right here where man wants to take something for himself. *I did it!* I am not a stock and a block. What is interesting is that this charge of stock and block is rooted in a denial of the gospel. The charge comes only where the gospel is preached.

No doubt, Calvin’s use of the word “passively” would be abhorred by many in the PRC because his use of “passively” involves the whole life of the believer. In order for the believer to fully understand that even all his devotion to God is the gift and work of God, Calvin went so far as to call even the believer’s acting a passive activity, so to speak. But Rev. Martyn McGeown rejected the idea that the believer is passive in justification when he wrote, “The faith by which we are justified is not passive.”¹² Recently he wrote, “I am intrigued to know from where the idea of faith as a subconscious, unconscious, passive bond came. I have not found it in theologians before Hoeksema.”¹³

I am not sure in what field Reverend McGeown is plowing because John Calvin wrote the following: “In regard to justification, faith is merely *passive*, bringing nothing of our own to procure the favor of God, but receiving from Christ everything that we want.”¹⁴ And Herman Bavinck wrote,

In this connection the older Reformed usually made a distinction between an active and a passive side to faith and confined themselves to saying that in justification faith only serves as a receptive organ or instrument, while in sanctification

10 Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 231. The insertions in brackets are the translator’s unless otherwise noted.

11 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2008), 2.5.11, 205.

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

13 Martyn McGeown, “Letters [answer to Rev. S. Key],” *Standard Bearer* 100, no. 18 (July 2024): 447.

14 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.13.5, 501, emphasis added.

it functions as a work and as the principle of good works. Against this view, the Remonstrants asserted that faith, precisely as an instrument, is an act that we are obligated to perform and by which we accept Christ. Comrie's position actually agreed with that of the Remonstrants: if we are justified by faith as an act, then justification is based on works. It is for this reason that in justification faith is not at all considered as act but solely as disposition (*habitus*).¹⁵

If Reverend McGeown had been at the Synod of Dordt, President Bogerman would have tossed out McGeown with the rest of the Arminians (Remonstrants).

The idea of one-sidedness is also rejected by the ministers and professors in the PRC today. They take great offense to one-sidedness. They deride it by saying that a balanced gospel is needed. I am not even sure what that means. The gospel is the good news that all of salvation has been accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ and that he sovereignly works this salvation in his elect children. Are we to understand that this balance means that God does half of the work of salvation and man does the other half? Whatever a *balanced gospel* is, it is not a gospel that proclaims salvation as entirely the work of God.

But you may ask, "What about 1 Corinthians 15:10? Did not Paul write, 'I laboured more abundantly than they all'? Am I not called to labor? If so, is it not my will that causes me to labor? After all, I am not a stock and a block." Again, we must see that this is the work of God in the believer. Calvin expressed it this way:

The grace of God was in me not without effect. But he [Pighius] ought to have noted the reason why [Paul] says this. The reason is that he has laboured more than all the rest. But lest, by boasting of his labours, he should seem to be claiming anything for himself, he immediately inserts a correction: Not I but the grace of God which was with me or which was beside me... But there was a danger that, after mentioning his own labours, he might give the impression, even by that single statement, that he was declaring that some portion of [his labours] at least was due to him. So he removes that suspicion by inserting the correction, saying that it had not been he who had laboured, but rather that this happened entirely as a result of the grace of God.¹⁶

The believer labors! Of course, he does. Every day he lives in the consciousness that God calls him to a life of thankful obedience. This is the believer's obligation, as the baptism form reads. It is his heart's desire to love God and his neighbor, and he does this every day, although imperfectly. And because the believer daily sins against his God, the Spirit continually works in the believer the good fruit of repentance and sorrow for his sins. And by faith—by faith alone—he has forgiveness in the blood of Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 61). The believer hates his sin, and every day he lives in the consciousness of his total dependence upon the Holy Spirit to sanctify him. This knowledge keeps the believer before the throne of grace, beseeching God for his continued grace and Holy Spirit to fight the good fight of faith. With heartfelt desire he prays with the psalmist, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11).

Why is all this true of the believer? Because God effectually works in the believer! None of this makes man a stock and a block, but this makes him a willing instrument in the hands of his God. This is very offensive to the natural man because he believes that he is the one who determines his own way and that his will is sovereign! But why would this be so offensive to one who calls himself a believer? This amazing gospel causes the true child of God to fall to his knees in humility and to cry out, "Why me, Lord? Why was I chosen to be an instrument of grace in thy hands?"

This relationship between God and man is not a mutual relationship, a mutual affection toward one another. By definition the idea of *mutual* requires two parties, not two parts. Salvation is entirely one-sided. It is all of God. Rev. Herman Hoeksema gave a lovely and beautiful description of this truth:

Of him it is that we love him. For our love of God, of God who is really God, the infinitely good, the overflowing fountain of all good, is not in us by nature. By nature, oh awful folly of sin, we hate God and love the devil, we hate righteousness and love iniquity, we flee from the fountain of good and seek death. Neither is our love to God our own response to his love to us, a love wherewith we meet his love. But it is the vibration of his own love to himself, which by his grace he causes to pass through our hearts, the divine love-current, in which we are caught up, returning to its source.¹⁷

15 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 114. Bavinck wrote, "In sanctification it [faith] functions as a work and as the principle of good works." However, we would say that being sanctified we work *out of* faith, not that faith becomes a work.

16 Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 197–98.

17 Herman Hoeksema, *Communion with God: Reformed Spirituality*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2011), 327.

This idea of *mutual* was not foreign to Reverend Hoeksema. In 1952 in defense of the unconditional covenant, he wrote the following:

And the relation between those two parts of the covenant is certainly not that of mutual stipulations and conditions. But it is such that the realization of our part of the covenant is the fruit of the part which God fulfills in us and through us. And that there is such a second part of the covenant possible is only because God realizes His covenant in us and through us not as dead stocks and blocks, but as rational, moral creatures.¹⁸

But what about the good works of the believer? Is it not at this point where man's will is decisive?

Calvin described the relationship between good works and man's will this way:

If, when engrafted into Christ, we bear fruit like the vine, which draws its vegetative power from the moisture of the ground, and the dew of heaven, and the fostering warmth of the sun, I see nothing in a good work, which we can call our own, without trenching upon what is due to God. It is vain to have recourse to the frivolous cavil, that the sap and the power of producing are already contained in the vine, and that, therefore, instead of deriving everything from the earth or the original root, it contributes something of its own. Our Savior's words simply mean, that when separated from him, we are nothing but dry, useless wood, because, when so separated, we have no power to do good, as he elsewhere says, "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matt 15:13). Accordingly, in the passage already quoted from the Apostle Paul, he attributes the whole operation to God, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). The first part of a good work is the will, the second

is vigorous effort in the doing of it. God is the author of both. It is, therefore, robbery from God to arrogate anything to ourselves, either in the will or the act.¹⁹

And Calvin wrote,

For he [Pighius] is leaving out the principal and more necessary part of its [scripture's—TB] teaching [Pighius taught that scripture was clear that man had a free choice based on all its commands, threats, etc.—TB] which is contained in the promises of grace; when this is recognised, he achieves nothing by his claims. For after God has commanded us to walk in his commandments, he promises that he will cause us so to walk, that is, he will give us the mind and feet. But all the law, all the commands, as well as all the exhortations, rebukes, and threats, direct us and as it were lead us by the hand to the promises, where God reduces all our goodness to nothing by attributing every portion of our good works to himself and his grace. So, therefore, he who measures human powers by the law and the commands betrays the fact that he does not yet grasp the first principles of the faith.²⁰

Calvin gave the church a beautiful description of the purpose of all the commands, rebukes, and exhortations that must and do come to the church through her preaching: "All the law, all the commands, as well as all the exhortations, rebukes, and threats, direct us and as it were lead us by the hand to the promises." The law, the commands, and exhortations do not give you grace.²¹ They do not give you the promise, which is Christ, but they lead you to the promise. And it is Christ (by the power of his grace alone) that "will give you the mind and feet."

Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote the following regarding the admonitions in Ephesians 4:25–27:

The old man must be suppressed, must be laid aside, and his works must be put to death; the

18 Herman Hoeksema, "The Promise according to the Confessions," *Standard Bearer* 29, no. 3 (November 15, 1952): 53.

19 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.3.9, 185.

20 Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 138.

21 "The proper office of Christ is, after the law hath pronounced a man to be guilty, to raise him up again, and to loose him from his sins, if he believe the gospel. For to all that do believe, 'Christ is the end and the full finishing of the law unto righteousness: he is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world' (Romans x, 4; John i, 29). But the Papists and Anabaptists, because they understand not this doctrine, do turn all clean contrary, making of Christ Moses, and of Moses Christ. And this is indeed, (although they will say otherwise) their principal proposition: that Christ is Moses. Moreover, they deride us, because we do diligently teach, and so earnestly require faith. Ha, ha, say they, faith, faith: wait thou the time until thou come to heaven by faith. Nay, thou must strive to do greater and weightier matters. Thou must fulfil the law, according to that saying: 'Do this and thou shalt live' (Luke x, 28). Faith, which ye do so highly extol, does nothing else but make men, careless, idle and negligent. Thus are they become nothing else but ministers of the law and law-workers, calling back the people from baptism, faith, the promises of Christ, to the law and works, turning grace into the law, and the law into grace" (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, rev. Erasmus Middleton [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1930], 122–23).

new man must rule, must reveal himself more and more, must always be on the throne, and must walk worthy of the calling wherewith God has called him, unto the praise of his grace. Not as if it were the apostle's meaning that the accomplishment of sanctification would be the work of the child of God; that is and remains until the very last gasp the work of divine grace.²²

It has always been the teaching of our fathers that salvation in its entirety (including our good works) is the work of God and that man is and only ever will be an instrument. This is humbling and of great comfort to the believer! Salvation in every aspect is not dependent upon the believer. Does not the Spirit use this knowledge of Christ, which is the gospel, to cause the believer to strive to live a life in thankful obedience to God? Indeed, the Spirit does! This is the experience of every child of God who comes under the preaching of the gospel. It is impossible that the preaching of the gospel will cause the believer to live a careless and profane life or to lead an unfruitful life. For one to believe otherwise is not only to deny the work of the Spirit of Christ in the life of the believer, but it is also to show that he has not tasted of the Spirit of Christ.

This denial that salvation is not entirely dependent upon the sovereign power of God's grace alone was shown by Rev. Ken Koole when he taught the members in the PRC that grace is available:

Beloved, the question is, are you seeking the grace that is available?...I am not talking about regenerating grace. That's sovereign grace that renews a man. I'm talking about the grace of which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks: he will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those only who ask him in sincerity for them. That's the grace and Holy Spirit, beloved, to withstand temptation. And we don't have that automatically!²³

Koole was careful to distinguish between regeneration and the work of sanctification. In regeneration this grace is irresistible (with which we agree), but in the believer's life of sanctification, then this grace is available. What

is so amazing about this distinction is that there are two different kinds of grace in the PRC: an irresistible grace and a resistible grace. This second, resistible grace is available to the believer. I would argue that this resistible grace is not only available, but also it can be understood to be an offer. God makes grace available or offers it to the believer. It is an impotent, resistible grace that depends on the believer's asking for it.

The teaching of available grace also shows that the work of salvation in the PRC is presented as having the possibility of not happening. This idea was already being taught by Rev. Ronald Cammenga in a sermon in 2003. After preaching that Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation, Cammenga said,

I must become one with him so that I enjoy his fellowship and share in his salvation. For salvation it is necessary that I come to him. *And if I do not come to him*, there is no salvation and no enjoyment of the blessing of salvation.²⁴

This was a conscious and deliberate separation between what God had joined together. Jesus cried, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Christ's gospel of this text was not "I did not do enough, so you must now decide whether or not you are going to come to me. And if you do come, then I will give you rest." No, this same Jesus by the power of his sovereign, irresistible grace in the gospel draws his weary and heavy-laden sheep unto himself. He makes them willing. Reverend Cammenga's presentation of the "gospel" was that the gospel is powerless and depends on man for its fulfillment, ably assisted by grace, of course.

Now it should be clear to everyone that the PRC has a powerless grace. What is worse is that it is a grace that becomes effectual only when man asks for it. This is a complete denial of irresistible grace. The problem for men like Reverend Koole is that they do not believe that all grace is irresistible. They do not understand that the believer in his life prays for the grace of God as a fruit of the irresistible grace that God already is working in the believer.²⁵ It is impossible for the believer not to pray for God's grace and Holy Spirit. The believer knows his

22 Hoeksema, *Communion with God*, 298–99.

23 Kenneth Koole, "Manna from Heaven," sermon preached in Hope Protestant Reformed Church on November 29, 2020.

24 Ronald Cammenga, "Jesus' Call to the Weary (1)," sermon preached in Southwest Protestant Reformed Church on October 12, 2003. Quoted in agenda of Classis East September 8, 2004, 9, emphasis added.

25 Calvin had this to say regarding God's grace: "For [Pighius says] my teaching that no one can seek the grace of God except one who is moved by the Spirit of God makes human beings straight into tree stumps. How so? Because from [my teaching] it follows that grace is available to no one and that no one has to seek it, since it is something which cannot be sought before it is possessed, and it is pointless to seek what is already possessed. But he is arguing just as if I had already conceded to him that there are not two different graces, a godly desire and its attainment [Calvin is saying here that there are two aspects of the same grace]. In fact I have already proved elsewhere from Augustine that 'it is soundness of faith [which causes you] to ask so that you receive, to seek so that you find, to knock so that the door is opened to you'" (*The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 234).

own inability to fight against his threefold enemy; and in this consciousness, which is worked in him by God, the believer desires and seeks through earnest prayer the grace and Holy Spirit of God and is thankful for them. As Reverend Hoeksema wrote, “As soon as you have rendered thanks unto his holy name, you are already under obligation to fall back on your knees and thank him for your gratitude.”²⁶

The PRC has a man-first theology with the effectiveness of salvation and sanctification in the hands of man. Man must do something for his salvation or the experience of his salvation. This is a complete denial of what grace is. Grace is the irresistible and sovereign power of God to work all of salvation in the heart and life of the believer.

Calvin rejected the idea that grace is available or is an offer:

The human will is of itself evil and therefore needs transformation and renewal so that it may begin to be good, but that grace itself is not merely a tool which can help someone if he is pleased to stretch out his hand to [take] it. That is, [God] does not merely offer it, leaving [to man] the choice between receiving it and rejecting it, but he steers the mind to choose what is right, he moves the will also effectively to obedience, he arouses and advances the endeavour until the actual completion of the work is attained. Then again, that [grace] is not sufficient if it is just once conferred upon someone, unless it accompanies him without interruption.²⁷

This is the amazing wonder of salvation! God’s grace is always conferred upon the believer without interruption. And this is because grace is only and ever an irresistible grace! Who can fully comprehend this wonder of grace in his life? The believer is never without the grace of God working salvation in his life. For the PRC God’s operation of grace (regeneration excepted) is not irresistible but is dependent on man’s activity. Or to say it another way, man must do something to obtain or to experience God’s grace or mercy. The ministers and professors in the PRC just cannot bring themselves to teach that God is working every aspect of salvation by his grace. They just cannot see that the believer’s entire life is the fruit of the sovereign, irresistible grace of God. Why cannot they say with Calvin, “[God] steers the mind to choose what is right, he moves the will effectively to obedience...”? This is the

wonder of the eternal decree of election that is taught in the Canons:

Men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects. (Canons of Dordt 1.9, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 157)

Election is a fountain from which all the blessings of salvation flow to and through the believer!

The ministers and professors in the PRC will not teach that God actually works all of salvation in the believer by God’s sovereign, irresistible grace. Why? Evidently, they are afraid of this wonderful and amazing gospel. Or worse, they believe this gospel will make men careless and profane. But then, as Calvin would say, “[They] don’t yet grasp the first principles of the faith.”

Protestant Reformed men are fond of saying that “by grace” we do this or that. But grace is merely some assistance. To them grace is like a crutch to a man who needs help walking. What should be obvious to all is that they are not teaching that God’s grace is sovereign and irresistible! If they were teaching irresistible grace, then they would have to teach that every aspect of salvation will be and is accomplished in and through man because it is God’s work. But if man is a party, then man must be reckoned with. Then the possibility exists that maybe man will not do what is required. After all, “Christ is not enough!” Man must cooperate with God in his salvation. Do you not know that man cannot be a stock and a block? There is a work for man to do in order to get this or that. Then one immediately falls into a salvation by grace and the works of man.

Rev. Gerrit Vos had this to say about such an “obnoxious mixture” and those who speak about man’s doing something for his salvation:

[An] obnoxious mixture...is when you mix grace with works.

You do that when you say, “Sure, sure, sure, sure, God works salvation by His marvelous grace. But we must also do something.” We are responsible creatures, you see. God gave us much, oh so much. And we must get to work, *ably* assisted (they will insist on that) by the *grace* of God. The Arminians almost wore out the word *grace* in their foul productions.

26 Herman Hoeksema, *All Glory to the Only Good God: Reformed Spirituality*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2013), 305.

27 Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, 114.

Then you have salvation by a mixture of grace and work.

And Satan smiles.

But God is furious.²⁸

Rev. Herman Hoeksema also wrote regarding those who teach that preservation, redemption, and election—or salvation in its subjective application—are all of works. These teachers make salvation to be dependent upon an act of man, yet they say that salvation is all of grace.

They would fain leave the impression that they attribute everything to grace. Strongly they emphasize that the Christian is surrounded by mighty powers of temptation and destruction, over against which he would not be able to stand for a moment if it were not for God's preserving grace. Without Christ the child of God can do nothing. Continually he must receive grace from God in order to stand. But whether he will receive this preserving grace continually, that depends once more upon an act of his own will. He must be willing to persevere, to stand, to fight the battle of faith. He must earnestly seek that preserving grace of the Lord. Then God will keep him. And then he will persevere, God helps those that help themselves! And thus, they overthrow once more all that they first confessed concerning the grace of God. It is of works, not of grace!²⁹

Reverend Hoeksema also had this to say in a lecture given in 1961.

Pelagianism means, beloved, oh, to be sure God works the work of sanctification only. No question about that. Pelagius said that too. God works the work of sanctification by grace. It's all grace. Of course! Pelagius said that too! Do not think that you meet with any Reformed man because he says that all the work of salvation is the work of God's grace. Oh, no, no, no, no! But Pelagianism says, beloved, that God will work that work of sanctification in the heart of anyone,

provided that one wills God to so work! That's Pelagianism. No question about it. We must be willing to be sanctified, and we must be willing to walk in all good works—willing—and then the Spirit of Christ will work in us. Nevertheless, the will of man is first. That is contrary to all scripture, and it is certainly contrary to all our Reformed confessions.³⁰

The reality that salvation is completely the work of God through the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ is the experience of every child of God.³¹ The believer confesses with immense joy that God is pleased to use him or her as an instrument. How humbling this is for the child of God.

Why does the PRC find this so offensive?

I might add here that there are those in the PRC who say that we in the RPC deny the experience of salvation in the life of the believer or that we deny the work of the Spirit. However, the very statements themselves show those members' theology. Those members in the PRC believe that they must do something in order to create this experience of salvation.

Dr. Abraham Kuyper gave a beautiful explanation of the experience of fellowship that the believer has with God.

If it's your praying, reflecting, striving, and loving that you think establishes your fellowship with the eternal, holy, completely blessed being we call God, you're being completely misled. And that's the truth! You contribute nothing whatsoever to establishing fellowship between God and your own soul. Only God can do that. All your praying and loving and praising do not create that fellowship. That's not what constitutes that fellowship! And where that fellowship does not exist, least of all can these make it happen. At most they are the flowering, the fruit, and the consequence of that fellowship.³²

You have fellowship with God! You have that because you are engrafted into Jesus Christ by faith alone. God gives this to the believer to know and experience by

28 Gerrit Vos, *The More Glorious Covenant: Rich Heritage of the New Testament Church* (Hudsonville, MI: Men's Society of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, 1986), 39.

29 Herman Hoeksema, *God's Eternal Good Pleasure*, ed. Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1979), 251–52.

30 Herman Hoeksema, "Sanctification," lecture given in Oak Lawn, Illinois, on April 6, 1961.

31 Canons of Dordt 1.12 teaches that the elect attain assurance of election "by observing in themselves, with a spiritual joy and holy pleasure, the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the Word of God—such as true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc." (*Confessions and Church Order*, 157). These things are observable in the life of the elect believer because they are the work of God's sovereign grace.

32 Abraham Kuyper, *Honey from the Rock: Daily Devotions from Young Kuyper*, trans. James A. De Jong (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 493.

faith. Your good works are the fruits of that fellowship with God. What an amazing and humbling reality that is for the child of God. Rejoice in that! Confess with the apostle Paul, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36).

Rev. G. Ophoff had this warning for the preacher:

To separate in the preaching the exhortations of the Scriptures from the Gospel, the obedience of the believers in repentance, faith, conversion and their holy conversation from the Gospel that God works in them both to will and to do, to fail always to set forth in the preaching how things here are related, or even to lay one-sided emphasis on the exhortations of the Scriptures and the obligations under which they bring men, and definitely the believers, is not to preach the Scriptures...the work of God whereby He works in His people both to will and to do, and the fruit of this work of God in them are always linked together. In combination, the one with the other, they constitute the Gospel of Christ to the believers.³³

Yes, this is the gospel of Christ. And where you do not have this instruction, you do not have the gospel! This has been lost in the PRC. Worse yet, it has been rejected.

The theology that the believer is only an instrument has been rejected in the PRC as antinomian. The ministers and professors believe that if they do not teach that man is a party in salvation, then they will make men to be careless and profane. But the charge against the gospel that it makes men careless and profane is always in the mouth of the Arminian. The apostle Paul dealt with that, and our fathers rejected this charge against the gospel in Lord’s Day 24 and Belgic Confession, article 24.

Why did the men in the PRC completely reject this teaching of our fathers? Our spiritual fathers were

faithful to scripture and the creeds in their explanations of God’s sovereign work of salvation in his covenant people. Our fathers were fond of saying, “Man is nothing, and God is everything!” This, in essence, was to teach that it is God who works in a man both the willing and the doing. I believe the words of the apostle John: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Spirit of God did that in the PRC many years ago, and that truth has been rejected. The only explanation is that God has given the PRC over to her false doctrine of man. She loves this doctrine of man. She cannot imagine that man is only an instrument in the hands of the living God. For whatever reasons, the PRC continues to insist that man is not just an instrument but is a party with God, though the PRC will try to deny this. The PRC finds the idea that man is nothing and God is everything to be repulsive.

Those of us in the RPC love the historic Protestant Reformed faith not only because it was taught to us by our spiritual fathers but also because it is the teaching of scripture and the Reformed creeds. It is the doctrine that man is an instrument in the hands of God that gives all the glory to God! May God preserve this truth in our midst as Reformed Protestant Churches. May it always be our joy to praise God for the great salvation that he has given and worked in us, his covenant people. And may God by his sovereign, irresistible grace continue to humble us with this confession: “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” And may we always confess that we are instruments of grace or vessels of honor in the hands of our heavenly Father, to whom alone belongs all the glory now and forever.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

—Tom Bodbyl

³³ Ophoff, “The Gospel and the Command,” 23.

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

INSTRUCTION ON JEHOVAH'S COUNSEL

*Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.
There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD,
that shall stand.—Proverbs 19:20–21*

As we near the close of summer break, we look forward to another year of covenantal instruction in our Reformed Protestant schools. Schools for which the sword has been drawn and blood shed. Schools over which many departed from the fellowship of the church. In the controversy over the school, nothing less than the truth of God's covenant was at stake. Do not believe for a moment that the school controversy was about anything less than the gracious, unconditional covenant of God with his people in Christ. Men and women railed against that covenant. They kicked up a big cloud of dust against the school as the demand of the covenant.

The demand of the covenant is grounded in Lord's Days 21 and 38, Church Order articles 21 and 44, and the questions asked of parents in the Reformed baptism form. Briefly, we define the demand of the covenant as the requirement to instruct our children together according to the vows we make at baptism that they be taught the doctrine of *this* Christian—Reformed Protestant—church. The Christian school is the carrying out and performing of those vows, which are made in the power of the Holy Spirit. When we talk about a demand or requirement, we insist upon the language of the baptism form—namely, our part in the covenant, that we cleave to the triune God of the covenant, trust in him, love him, forsake the world, crucify our flesh, and walk in new and holy lives. Our part is given to us of God as thankful worship and service of him. That thankful worship is demanded as part of our lives in the covenant, just as being members of a true church is demanded and baptizing our children is demanded. What God exposed in the controversy over the school were ungodly men and women who used the doctrine of gracious salvation as a cover for licentiousness, rebellion, and unbelief. The

doctrines of justification by faith alone and of unconditional covenant fellowship were not at fault for that rebellion and unbelief, but the fault lay in the wicked hearts and devices of man.

In the end the controversy surrounding the school revealed a complete ignorance of and even a maliciousness toward the doctrine of the covenant, of which many supposedly were ardent defenders. The essence of the covenant is God's fellowship and friendship. According to his unconditional promise, God establishes the covenant, maintains it, gives the enjoyment of his fellowship, and perfects that fellowship. God draws his people unto himself in their experiences and consciences by faith alone, which is worked by the Holy Spirit in the gospel. And in doing so God places them into the body of Christ as Christ's members. God did that eternally when he decreed Christ and the elect church as the body of Christ. And God reveals and gathers that body in time by the preaching of the gospel, setting each one of his people in his or her proper place as it has pleased him. And together as a body all the members raise their children, instructing them in the one faith of God's word. The fellowship in that covenant must necessarily show itself among those incorporated into the life of the covenant. A manifestation of that covenant life is the Christian day school where parents, through godly teachers who stand in their places, instruct their children about God in all the subject material of the classroom. The Christian school is certainly required. God is not indifferent toward the matter of the school, just as he is not indifferent toward his covenant.

It is the Christian school and, more specifically, the covenant children of believers that were in view in the graduation speech at Grace Reformed Protestant School delivered by the undersigned on Proverbs 19:20–21

under the theme “Instruction on God’s Counsel to the Graduate.”¹

Solomon began the proverb with the words “Hear counsel, and receive instruction.” A counselor is one who gives advice or guidance. The counselor gives instruction. Instruction is teaching with a view to a purpose. Instruction is the main work of the schoolteacher, parent, and officebearer. Always the one instructing has a purpose in mind. He does not aimlessly instruct. He prays, reads the scriptures, sings God’s word, admonishes, corrects, and teaches, having a purpose in his mind toward the ones he is instructing. This is true of ministers, teachers, and parents. When a minister teaches the congregation, he has in view the people’s eternal salvation. Parents discipline their child for the child’s eternal good. The teacher in the school instructs the children in a general education with the goal that the children might see their covenant God in all their instruction.

The text says that the purpose of instruction is to make one wise. The instructor teaches the child *God*. God is wisdom. Wisdom is a perfection of God. God does not merely possess the attribute wisdom like we might possess a piece of property. The property does not define who we are. But wisdom is who God is. He is that perfection, and all his perfections are one in him. All the instruction of the instructor is aimed with the purpose of teaching the child to know God as he is revealed in Christ. And to know God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ is salvation (John 17:3). The purpose of that instruction is that the child might know God and see God in all the wonderful works of his hands, and seeing God, to praise, glorify, and bless his name as the only good and almighty God.

Godly instruction has the purpose to teach the child Jesus Christ alone as the only way of salvation that God appointed. The counselor of the instruction is wisdom herself. Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24). In Proverbs 8 wisdom speaks, personified as a beautiful woman. She cries at the gates and the entry of the city. She speaks of excellent things. She speaks truth and righteousness, and there is no perverse word in her lips. She is better than rubies, and all things that men desire in this life are not to be compared to her.

The great antithesis in Proverbs is always folly. There is the divine wisdom of God, Jesus Christ, who is the counselor who teaches us concerning himself. Over against divine wisdom there is always the folly of man. Wisdom and folly always stand antithetically opposed. You either have wisdom, and you are saved, or you are the fool whom God will destroy in his righteous anger.

Man thinks himself to be wise, but man is nothing but a fool. He shows that he is a fool in the instruction of his children at home and in the school. The purpose of his instruction is not to teach God or to teach wisdom, but all his instruction is colored with man’s goodness, man’s achievements, man’s earthly hopes, and man’s activities. All the world’s education is folly because there is no Christ in it.

The world’s instruction is not just in the public schools, but I include with it all instruction in so-called Christian schools and in the Protestant Reformed schools that we left. You must always be ready to give an answer. Why do you not send your children there? Why will you not send them there? Because there is no wisdom. The instruction of those institutions is folly because they do not teach the children the almighty, triune God of their salvation; and they do not teach Jesus Christ alone as the way, the truth, and the life, whom God appointed for the purpose of the salvation of his people. That is why we separated from the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). That is why we do not instruct our children in the Protestant Reformed schools. The reason is that these churches and schools do not teach Christ. They do not teach Christ as the heart of the counsel of Jehovah. All their preaching and education then is folly, empty, and vain.

All the PRC’s instruction of her children in the Protestant Reformed schools must parrot what is taught off Protestant Reformed pulpits. For the PRC, man’s obedience, repentance, and good works are the necessary way to obtain the assurance of justification and the experience of the covenant. This instruction must also be taught in Protestant Reformed schools. To send your children willingly to those schools is no different than the Old Testament sin of offering children to Molech.

The theory of evolution has been entrenched in the education at the Protestant Reformed schools through the loaded term *microevolution*, which is evolution that happens over short time periods and on a small scale. I know this because I was taught it in the Protestant Reformed schools over ten years ago. Yet that teaching denies the counsel of the sovereign God of heaven and earth. The providence of God determinatively controls whether a frog can jump one inch or two inches or whether this or that mammal can now swim longer under water than before. Those changes were not evolutionary processes. God determined, governed, and upheld the circumstances and inputs of the environment, and he caused those changes. God governs and upholds all things. There is no such thing as evolution in God’s creation. Evolution in any form is a rejection of the sovereignty of God in his

1 This article is a revised and edited version of the speech, which can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlXTxtGsFM8&t=3453s>.

creation. Paul warned Timothy regarding this very thing: “Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called” (1 Tim. 6:20).

Common grace has also invaded Protestant Reformed thinking practically. Common grace speaks a certain language about the good gifts of God. The doctrine of common grace comes out in the thoughts and voices of the people. “God has given me many things, and therefore he is blessing me.” “That I have all this money, wealth, and influence is God’s blessing on me.” “What a blessing that all my children are healthy and not sick.” In the teaching of common grace, God’s grace is synonymous with the good gifts he gives. Then what naturally follows is that one has God’s blessing because he is a good person and obeys God. One begins to think, “I have all these good gifts as God’s blessings to me because of my obedience, or the gifts are related in some way to what I am doing.” It is not difficult to see how all the wealth and prosperity in the PRC has corrupted the truth that God’s blessing never lies in his good gifts themselves or is a result of one’s obedience. God’s grace is particular, only for God’s elect, and God’s blessing is never in things themselves. God blesses his people for Christ’s sake always, whether they have much or whether they have little, in rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, and riches and poverty.

What folly characterizes man’s instruction!

There are many devices in man’s heart. Man’s heart is his spiritual-ethical center. Out of man’s heart flows all the issues of life. Man’s heart in Eden was consecrated to God. Through that heart the whole of creation found its center. But man fell into sin, so that now as he is fallen in Adam, man’s heart is corrupt, black, and disgusting. Now man’s heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Man is nothing but a fool. A fool is one who hates knowledge. Before the fall man instantly and spontaneously knew and loved God. But with man’s fallen, corrupt heart, he hates the knowledge of his creator. Man loves the lie and hates the truth. He will not receive the truth; he will not listen to it; he rebels against that knowledge; and he bristles against it. A fool is easy to spot. A fool is one to whom the gospel comes, proclaiming that salvation is by grace alone without any working of man whatsoever, and the fool refuses to believe the gospel. Wisdom is believing the gospel. But the fool will not believe; nay, he cannot believe, for he has no faith, which has its anchor in election. The fool will not listen to or heed instruction. He plays fast and loose with God, Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the church.

The devices in man’s heart are all the thoughts, deeds, and actions of a man with a view to man’s purpose. Man always has a purpose with what he does. He has a plan to get rich and famous. He has a plan to lead a comfortable, easy, and pleasurable life. Man has many devices in his heart, and they are seemingly limitless and varied.

Really you can sum up those devices simply as this: with all of man’s purposes and the folly of his own heart, man wants to be God. That was man’s device in the garden when the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve thought to themselves that they could be as God, and ever since then it has been the same thing. All the sin in the world comes from that root sin and develops from it. Man desires to be God. And the ultimate expression and development of that root sin in the garden will be the culmination of man in the antichrist. Man throughout all of history in his purposes and his plans desires to be as God, and man is the fool for it.

That is true in the false church. Man sets out with his purpose of numerical growth, earthly peace, or prosperity. In the false church man enthrones himself as God in the salvation of sinners. Man teaches the lie that in some sense man is determinative for some aspect of salvation. There is that which man must do to be saved. One must repent in order to experience forgiveness and enter the kingdom. One must obey the law and do good works as a way to obtain assurance. These are man’s devices out of man’s corrupt heart in his desire to be as God in his own salvation.

Nevertheless, the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand. Over against all of man’s plans and purposes, there is the striking phrase of verse 21: the counsel of *Jehovah*, that shall stand. What is Jehovah’s counsel? Jehovah’s counsel is everything that he has determined with a view to *his* purpose. Jehovah’s counsel is eternal, all-comprehensive, perfect, wise, and sovereign. That counsel determined everything that has ever occurred or will come to pass. Jehovah decreed the end from the beginning. His counsel is that which he deliberately thought and planned; therefore, that counsel is determinative.

The emphasis of the text is on God’s counsel as he decreed all things with a view to *his* purpose. He has one purpose, and according to that purpose he works all things. And that purpose includes all of man’s purposes and devices. Man thinks that he is shrewd and smart. Man thinks that he is something in his devices and ingenuity. But understand that God’s counsel encompasses all of man’s purposes too, so that nothing stands outside God’s counsel and control, and God executes *his* purpose in and through all of man’s devices.

That one singular purpose of God is Jesus Christ. He is the heart of God's counsel. There is simply no purpose for anything other than Christ. God said, "I am going to reveal myself in Christ. To do that, I will fashion a creation and uphold a creation according to my counsel. Sin will come into the creation so that I might reveal my only-begotten Son as the savior of my people, who will redeem the creature to a higher and more glorious state than could have ever been attained by man." God was working his purpose when he sent Christ into the world in our flesh. God was working his purpose when at the cross Jesus Christ poured out his blood. God executes his counsel in and through all of man's devices.

So when out of hatred for God and his Christ, wicked men thought, "We are going to kill the Christ," there God executed perfectly his eternal purpose in crucifying his only-begotten, beloved Son. God carried out the death sentence of his Son, using the most wicked atrocity man has ever perpetrated, in order to save his elect people from death and woe appalling.

God raised Christ from the dead! That was God's counsel too. That resurrection shall stand forever as the declaration to the sinner that his sins are forever blotted out and that presently he shall enter eternal glory with his risen Lord. The cross and resurrection are the great bookends to the totality of the elect sinner's salvation. Both the cross and the resurrection God eternally determined.

All of time and history is the unfolding of what God determined, of what he purposed in himself, and he rushes all things toward that purpose to unite all things in Jesus Christ in the new heavens and the new earth to glorify himself. When God framed the worlds, he always had in view the new creation united in the glorified Son of God in the flesh, along with all his elect, to perfect all things in the Son. All the history of the nations and the kingdoms of this world and all the laws, logic, and order of the creation must serve the purpose to glorify God in Christ. Do you see how no instruction can be apart from Christ, who stands at the center of the counsel of Jehovah?

That counsel shall stand! Forever it stood, and forever it shall remain.

Jehovah's counsel is wise. The emphasis in Proverbs 19:21 is on the wisdom of the counsel of Jehovah. God in his eternal purpose as he decreed all things carries out that purpose in the most-wise manner. Because God is wisdom, so also his eternal counsel is wise. Wisdom in the triune God is that perfection in which he orders his divine life within himself. He knows how to and does order his life perfectly. And so in his counsel God orders, arranges, and governs all that he decrees so that all things

serve his glory, the exaltation of Christ, and the salvation of his elect church.

God shows himself as the infinitely wise God especially in the revelation of Jesus Christ. God's wisdom was realized centrally at the cross because he willed to glorify himself along the deep way of sin and grace. Jesus Christ, as he walked on this earth, pressed all things into the service of God. Jesus willingly obeyed God in perfect consecration to God. And that led Christ right to the cross, where at that cross God made foolish the wisdom of the world. Man said about the cross, "This is folly."

But God said, "This is my wisdom. This is my perfect way of salvation for my elect people. And I have determined the preaching of the gospel as the most efficient means—as my wisdom—for the salvation of my people and the carrying out of my eternal counsel and purpose, to apply unto my elect people all the salvation that I have stored up for them in Jesus Christ." The preaching of the gospel, which declares the wisdom of God, stands over against all of man's folly and man's devices.

And God gives to his elect children wisdom. God gives to the elect sinner Jesus Christ. When God joins an elect sinner to Jesus Christ, Christ becomes wisdom to that elect sinner. Jesus Christ is made unto you wisdom. When you have Christ, you have wisdom. This means that Christ is your complete and total salvation, and you seek nothing besides him all the days of your life. Christ becomes to you a refreshing drink of water in a dry desert. Christ becomes bread for the starving. Christ becomes the sweetest, most glorious reality in the whole world to the sinner. You must have Christ, and you must throw man overboard—man's working, man's obedience, and man's repentance. You must have in your instruction Christ, Christ, and more Christ. Nothing else stands but that counsel of Jehovah. Everything else will burn away; all the world's education, advancements, and achievements and all man's hopes, dreams, and aspirations will melt away in the great day of the Lord.

The wise man apprehends the reality that is Jehovah God and his counsel. The wise man understands that reality, and he does not build his house upon the sand. He builds his house upon the rock. The wise man adapts his whole life to the ultimate reality, which is God himself. That is what man and man's devices always deny. The man who does not adapt himself to the counsel of Jehovah is a fool. He is like the man who sits in a burning house and refuses to leave that house but instead rolls over in bed while the house burns down. Or the fool is the man who sees a tornado coming and refuses to go in the basement. Or the fool is the man who sees the storm surge of a hurricane and does not find higher ground.

Because Christ is the wisdom of God to you, you see the whole world and all things in your life from the viewpoint of Jesus Christ. You see that all things must serve him. You understand in a new light all things from the vantage point of eternity. You stop seeking salvation outside of him in yourself or another. And having that wisdom, you press all the gifts and abilities that God has given to you into the service of God's covenant. To have wisdom is to be covenantally minded. That is the Christian school, dear reader! To press all your abilities and gifts into the instructing of covenant children. The fool says, "I do not want or need the school." The fool kicks up dust surrounding the school. The fool reveals himself in his folly as a hater of God's covenant. But to have wisdom is to have the mind of Christ and to love the body of Christ.

The counsel of Jehovah, *that* shall stand. And literally that means to rise up. The counsel of Jehovah rises up. The idea is not that Jehovah's counsel had to muscle its way to the top, that Jehovah's counsel had to beat out all of man's devices to rise to the top. It is not as if Jehovah's counsel got to the top in spite of being thwarted by sin, Satan, man, and man's devices. God's counsel is not some divine plan B. His counsel stands. It stands perfectly. It is perfect within God, and it will be perfectly executed. God is never frustrated or thwarted. His counsel stands as he decreed it all and as he executes it perfectly for his purpose.

Jehovah's counsel, that is what stands.

Jehovah's counsel includes election. Jehovah's decree of election has determined everything about you. Election, which joined you to Christ. Election, which obtained faith. Election, which obtained the promise. Election—not your repentance—which obtained the forgiveness of sins and justification. Election, which formed you as a church. Election, which gathered you into a body. Election, which gave to you the communion of saints. It is all election. Election is the reason God sent Christ to the cross for you. Election is the reason God sent to you the gospel. Election is the reason God does anything for his people. God was eternally determined to save his people; he desired their salvation. So much does God love his children that he desired that they know his love, that they experience it, and that they enjoy it. So much does God love you that he sent to you the gospel that you might adore him, that you might love him, that you might know him, that you might experience the blessedness he stored up for you, that you might give glory to him, and that you might thank him.

Jehovah's counsel stands.

His counsel includes reprobation too. You cannot talk about election without talking about reprobation.

Reprobation is the ultimate explanation why there is a wholesale rejection of the gospel, why many do not want wisdom but choose to remain as fools, their hearts full of man's devices. Reprobation is the explanation why many refuse instruction. In reprobation God said, "I hate these ones, and I am going to destroy these ones, and all of their lives long my wrath will abide on them." The world thinks itself wise, but the world is nothing but foolish without the knowledge of God's counsel, without the knowledge of Christ, without the knowledge of God's purpose, and without his divine wisdom.

Jehovah's counsel shall stand. And that means too that the word shall stand. That is the only thing that stands. The holy scriptures stand as the revelation of God. The scriptures, which are able to make one wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus, shall stand. All that God speaks in his word, all that God testifies unto his elect people, shall stand. The free forgiveness of sins, free and everlasting righteousness, that shall stand. That Christ came to justify the ungodly from their sins shall stand.

Why does all this stand? Exactly because it is all of the counsel of *Jehovah*. Jehovah's counsel stands over against all of man's counsels and devices exactly because of whose counsel it is. It is the counsel of God, who stands absolutely sovereign over all that is created, who is self-sufficient without any need of the creature. It is the counsel of the I AM THAT I AM. It is the counsel of the one who reigns over the heavens and the earth. It is the counsel of the one who is ever faithful to his covenant and his promise to forgive his people their sins and to bring them into their eternal inheritance. Jehovah is the one who with his almighty hand carries all that out with absolute perfection. His counsel determined your salvation. His counsel determined all the blessings that you have in Jesus Christ. His counsel stands because it is the counsel of the faithful, covenant God.

Hear God's word at the end of verse 20: "That thou mayest be wise in thy latter end." When the text says "thy latter end," it is talking about your eternal state. The latter end is salvation or no salvation. For the elect God committed to Jesus Christ, who is God's wisdom, all of their salvation. To be wise unto your latter end is to be wise unto salvation. It is to have Jesus Christ. When God in election gives you true wisdom, you are saved completely—without any of your works.

To be wise unto your latter end then is simply this: do nothing for your salvation. That is wisdom. That is the instruction on Jehovah's counsel. To be wise unto your latter end is to do nothing for your salvation. Do you believe that? Do not do a thing. Stop working and laboring. God perfected that salvation. He accomplished it all

without your working. Christ did it all. To be wise unto your latter end is to stop trusting in yourself. Stop trusting in your good works. Stop trusting in your obedience. Renounce yourself and any good that you have. Wisdom is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has done everything for you and whose blessedness you receive because you have his Holy Spirit. The fool will not believe that but will perish in his folly. The PRC and her schools will never teach that because they are fools. They will always add a “but” after they say that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God

alone: “But man must repent...But man must do good works...But man must believe.”

To be wise unto your latter end is to stop with the “buts” and to confess that salvation is of Jehovah and that you are of all men most undeserving of God’s grace and eternal favor.

Therefore, as members of the body of Christ, we instruct our children in this heavenly doctrine in harmony with our baptismal vows to teach them the truth taught in the Reformed Protestant Churches.

—TDO

OUR DOCTRINE

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

THE STATE OF THEOLOGY OF A CENTURY-OLD PRCA¹

The Question of Interest

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America are nearly a century old. After the Christian Reformed synod in 1924 made its decision on the three points of common grace and subsequently expelled Rev. Herman Hoeksema, Rev. George Ophoff, and Rev. Henry Danhof on the grounds of ecclesiastical insubordination, the respective consistories of those three ministers banded together on March 6, 1925, and by an Act of Agreement formed the Protesting Christian Reformed Churches. Although the three ministers and their consistories were accused of schism, the Christian Reformed Church was the cause of that separation because the denomination had adopted the three points of common grace, which were Pelagian and Arminian in real tendency, and because the Christian Reformed Church was determined to shut the mouths of her faithful members who raised their voices

in protest against that triple corruption of the Reformed truth. When it became abundantly clear that the Christian Reformed Church was hell-bent on maintaining the three points of common grace, the Protesting Christian Reformed Churches officially organized as a classis at the end of 1926 and adopted the name Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

Herman Hoeksema explained what the churches meant when they called themselves the Protestant Reformed Churches. By that name

the churches meant to express that they stand on the basis of the Reformed Churches of the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, officially adopt the Reformed Standards as their basis of unity and are devoted to the maintenance and positive development of the Reformed truth as embodied in those Standards.²

¹ This article is a revised and edited version of a speech that the undersigned gave to First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church in Bulacan, Philippines, on June 8, 2024, at the occasion of the church’s second anniversary. The title of the speech is the theme that was assigned to the undersigned, while the speech itself focused especially on the calculated and deliberate and willful change to the doctrine of faith that has recently occurred in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Although a few articles in *Sword and Shield* have examined this recent development, there is still more to say on the matter.

² Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America: Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: First Protestant Reformed Church, 1947), 287.

For the occasion of this speech, I want to draw attention to what Hoeksema said in that quotation, for at the time of her formation in 1926, the Protestant Reformed denomination was devoted to the maintenance of the Reformed truth as embodied in the Reformed standards—namely, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. The churches were devoted both to the maintenance and to the positive development of the Reformed truth.

I draw attention to Hoeksema's quotation because for this speech I am not interested in providing a mere, academic survey of the theology of the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches in America. Rather, I am interested in examining the theology of the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches with a view to this matter: Is the denomination still devoted to the maintenance and positive development of the Reformed truth as embodied in the Reformed standards upon which she stood as the basis of her unity at the time of her formation? Does the theology of the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches reflect this maintenance and positive development of the Reformed truth? That is the question.

The answer to that question has this very practical application: if the present theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches reflects the maintenance and positive development of the Reformed truth, then the denomination manifests that her cause is Christ's cause in the world. If by her present theology the Protestant Reformed denomination defends and promotes the truth and likewise exposes and condemns the lie, then all who oppose that denomination of churches will be smashed to pieces. All who oppose her will be smashed to pieces because they make war not against mere churches but against the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and they vainly attempt to thwart God's decree.

However, if the present theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches no longer reflects such a maintenance and positive development of the Reformed truth, then her cause is become the very cause of antichrist. If the denomination has corrupted the Reformed truth upon which she once stood, then she has rebelled against the Lord and now opposes him. The churches of the denomination will surely come to naught. The denomination will be broken by the Lord's rod of iron and dashed to pieces. If she no longer maintains and positively develops the Reformed truth, then the century-old Protestant Reformed denomination has cast out Christ and become the synagogue of Satan. That is the seriousness and application of the topic that you have given to me.

As one considers the state of theology in the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches, it is abundantly clear that the denomination has indeed willingly forsaken

the old paths. She has deliberately rejected the glorious truths of the Reformed faith that were once taught in her midst. And she aggressively maintains and develops not the truth but the lie.

To prove that I do not need to examine all that the PRC has to say today about God, man, Christ, salvation, the church, and the end times. This is to say, to prove the assertion that the Protestant Reformed denomination aggressively maintains and develops the lie, I do not need to examine the Protestant Reformed Churches in all the loci of Reformed dogmatics. The truth is one. The truth is one because God is one. If there is any hardened and rebellious departure from any aspect of the truth, then that hardened and rebellious departure will necessarily permeate and corrupt her whole theology.

I can tell you what the state of theology is in the Protestant Reformed denomination simply by examining what she teaches today about faith. This speech will be about faith.

It is exactly regarding this particular doctrine of faith that the Protestant Reformed denomination has made a most dramatic departure from the Reformed truth as embodied in the Reformed standards. The PRC has corrupted the doctrine of faith in closest connection with the controversy that the Reformed Protestant denomination has with the PRC—namely, the controversy over how salvation is applied to the elect child of God and how the elect child of God possesses and experiences and enjoys his salvation that is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

By corrupting the doctrine of faith, the century-old Protestant Reformed denomination corrupts the whole doctrine of salvation, for the elect child of God is saved through faith. Through faith he is justified. Through faith he is sanctified. Through faith he is glorified. Through faith he receives all things. Through faith he is kept in communion with Jesus Christ and all his benefits. And all of salvation is corrupted by what the PRC teaches concerning faith.

But more than that, because the truth is one, the century-old denomination corrupts her whole theology. She corrupts the truth of election. She corrupts the truth of the cross. She corrupts the truth about man. She ultimately corrupts the truth of God. By her doctrine of faith, the century-old Protestant Reformed denomination no longer teaches the sovereign God who infallibly accomplishes his good pleasure in his elect and in all the world. The PRC pays lip service to the sovereignty and good pleasure of God, but by her doctrine of faith she teaches a god who engages in a mutually dependent relationship with man, so that there is a mutual interplay and interdependence between God's blessings and man's activities.

By her doctrine of faith, the PRC teaches a different god. By her doctrine of faith, the PRC manifests her whole theology. By her doctrine of faith, the PRC manifests that she has forsaken the cause of Jesus Christ and become fundamentally antichristian.

And so, for the purpose of this speech on the state of theology in the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches in America, I will address her doctrine of faith.

The Issue

The ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches have decided very recently to change their doctrine of faith. This change to the doctrine of faith is not the rogue action of a minister or two. This change to the doctrine of faith is not an unintentional teaching by a new minister fresh out of seminary. This change to the doctrine of faith is a calculated and deliberate and willful change to what the PRC taught from the beginning and which doctrine of faith was formerly maintained and positively developed.

The doctrine of faith was maintained and positively developed by the Protestant Reformed Churches especially during her controversy over the conditional covenant during the 1940s and 1950s. The doctrine of the conditional covenant insisted that God makes general and conditional promises for the blessedness of his covenant. And faith, as it was erroneously taught at that time, was the condition that God required of man to enter and to enjoy God's covenant. That doctrine of the conditional covenant entered the Protestant Reformed Churches through the teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder and the liberated churches from the Netherlands. Especially through this controversy the Protestant Reformed Churches maintained and positively developed the doctrine of faith.

Today, the ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches have decided to change their doctrine of faith from what historically had been taught by them. This change to the doctrine of faith has to do with the essence and fundamental nature of faith.

When I speak about the essence of faith, I refer to what faith really is. The essence of a tree is what a tree really is. The essence of a horse is what a horse really is. The PRC has decided to change the essence of faith. This change to the doctrine of faith affects the answer to such questions as, what is faith? what is faith *at its heart*? what is the *first thing* that you think of when you say the word *faith*? and when scripture says that you are saved by grace through faith, what is it about that faith that you have in mind?

Today, the PRC consciously and deliberately rejects the truth about faith. The PRC rejects what she has been

taught from her youth, in what she has been catechized, and what the ministers have taught from their pulpits for many years. The PRC teaches that faith is not a bond. Faith, as she now teaches, is not essentially and fundamentally the real, spiritual union with the Lord Jesus Christ—the living bond that unites the elect sinner to Jesus Christ.

Today, the PRC consciously and deliberately teaches that faith is *only* man's activity of believing. In the year of our Lord 2024, the PRC teaches that faith is essentially and fundamentally not a bond but man's activity of believing and trusting in Jesus Christ. Most emphatically, the PRC now insists that faith is not a bond. Most emphatically, the PRC insists that faith is not union between Jesus Christ and his elect people. Rather, most emphatically, the PRC insists that faith is merely man's activity of trusting in Jesus Christ.

I give two examples from the past month.

Rev. Martyn McGeown, the minister of Providence Protestant Reformed Church, wrote the following:

The Holy Spirit creates a spiritual, living connection between Christ and the sinner at regeneration. That union with Jesus Christ takes place not when we believe, but when we are regenerated, that is, when we are given new life by the Holy Spirit and cease to be dead in trespasses and sins. *That union, however, is not faith. It is a confounding of concepts to call it faith. We should reserve the language of faith for the activity of believing.*³

Reverend McGeown made very clear that faith is not the living bond and union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Reverend McGeown made very clear that the term *faith* is to be used exclusively to refer to the activity of man. Faith is no union. Faith is essentially and fundamentally man's "activity of believing."

But Reverend McGeown is not the only one who is teaching this. Rev. Joshua Engelsma, the minister of Crete Protestant Reformed Church, preached this new doctrine of faith less than a month ago in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church, while providing pulpit supply. He preached this new doctrine of faith in connection with Lord's Day 7.

Lord's Day 7 is that grand exposition of the doctrine of faith in the Heidelberg Catechism. Lord's Day 7 is composed of the following two questions and answers:

Q. 20: Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?

A. No, only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith.

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

Q. 21: What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are, freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90)

Here I need to point out that the literal reading of this Lord's Day in the German language makes very clear that faith is a living bond that unites the elect sinner to Jesus Christ. The literal reading of answer 20 is this: No, only such as *by true faith are engrafted into him*, and receive all his benefits.

By faith, the Catechism says, we are engrafted into Jesus Christ. By faith we are made one plant with Jesus Christ, one living organism.

The language of engrafting brings us into the world of horticulture. I do not know if any of you have experimented with grafting branches into a trunk. There are many reasons that someone would take a branch from one tree and engraft it into the trunk of another tree. For example, you could use a single tree trunk and engraft branches that yield different kinds of fruit, so that you could yield multiple types of fruit from a single tree or even yield different kinds of fruit throughout multiple seasons. Or you can engraft a pollinating branch into a fruit tree to increase the yield of the tree or to avoid the need for a separate pollinating tree. And the reasons for engrafting go on and on. For the engrafting process, you take a branch and cut a wedge into its base; then you take the trunk of the tree and make a receiving cut into it; then you insert the branch, secure it, and cover up the joint that was made between the branch and the trunk. And not long after that engrafting process, you can remove whatever covering there was over that joint between the branch and the trunk, and you will discover a living bond—a graft—that exists between the branch and the trunk.

With this picture in mind, we can understand what the Heidelberg Catechism means when it explicitly states that we are engrafted into Jesus Christ by means of a graft, which graft is faith. Just as the graft is the living union between the branch and the trunk—so that when the graft develops, there is real, organic unity between the branch and the trunk; they are one plant, and the life of

that trunk is life for the branch—so too faith is that living union between Christ and his elect church. Through faith we are united to Christ, really and spiritually, such that we are one organism. We are branches cut out of the corrupt and rotten trunk of Adam, and we are engrafted into Christ through faith, so that his life is in us.

But Reverend Engelsma rejected this clear teaching of the Catechism when he preached on Lord's Day 7, thereby departing from the maintenance and positive development of the Reformed truth. He preached the following:

First of all, question and answer 20...speaks of those who are engrafted into him. And that's the language of union to the Lord Jesus Christ. To be engrafted into him is to be united to the Lord Jesus Christ. When we speak of being united to the Lord Jesus Christ, it's not faith that establishes that living bond. Faith is not something inherent in us. It's not some natural ability in us, whereby we bring ourselves into union to the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴

You must see what Reverend Engelsma did there. His doctrine is much more subtle than Reverend McGeown's, which I detest. Reverend Engelsma knows full well that he is altering the doctrine of faith that was taught for years in the Protestant Reformed Churches, but he cloaked his departure from the truth under very smooth speech. He spoke like the serpent. He employed the cunning art of misdirection. His argument was that faith cannot be that bond with Jesus Christ. Why? Because faith is not something that is inherent in us or some natural ability.

Well, of course faith is not some natural ability that is inherent in man! That is obvious. Faith is a gift. But Reverend Engelsma used this simplistic and irrelevant argument to discard the idea that faith itself as to its very essence is a living bond and union with Jesus Christ. And Reverend Engelsma went on to say,

Now, when the Holy Spirit unites us, that living union to Jesus Christ, he works in us then and gives to us the seed, or the faculty, or the power of faith. Something that's bestowed to us by the Spirit in our regeneration. I'm not talking now about the activity of that faith, but the seed, the power, the faculty of faith as that's given to us freely, graciously of God, by the working of the Holy Spirit.⁵

4 Joshua Engelsma, "What is True Faith?," sermon preached in Loveland Protestant Reformed Church on May 19, 2024, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=51924235648439>.

5 Joshua Engelsma, "What is True Faith?"

Reverend Engelsma, in his insistence that faith is essentially the activity of man, said that faith comes like a seed and is worked by the Holy Spirit. What is that seed? That seed is the *capability* or the *potential* to believe on Jesus Christ. That seed is the activity of man that will eventually develop and come to conscious expression.

What Reverend Engelsma said sounds very nice on the surface, but it is an astounding overthrow of the doctrine of faith. In the end Reverend Engelsma emphasized that faith is man's activity, and he quietly rejected the idea that faith is essentially and fundamentally union with Jesus Christ.

What these two examples illustrate is a calculated and deliberate and willful change to the doctrine of faith from what the fathers in the Protestant Reformed Churches always taught.

For example, Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote the following on Lord's Day 7, question and answer 20:

The Catechism here offers a profound spiritual conception of saving faith: it is the means whereby we are united with Christ, *the spiritual bond whereby we are made one body, one plant with Him*, so that by faith we may live from Him, draw our all from Him, and thus receive all His benefits...

*And the spiritual bond that so makes us one plant with Christ that we live out of Him, is faith.*⁶

Further, I quote from Prof. Herman Hanko regarding faith:

Faith is, in its essential nature, the bond that unites the believer to Christ...

Faith is not, first of all, believing. But it is, first of all, the living "connection" between Christ and His people...

This idea of faith as a bond lies behind the truth that faith is the gift of God. The union which is formed between Christ and His people by which they become one body with Him is not a union created by man; it is God's work entirely. This bond is established between the living Christ, in whom are all the blessings of

salvation, and the dead sinner in whom is not a spark of spiritual life...

As that faith comes to consciousness in the life of the child of God, it always remains the bond of union with Christ...⁷

That faith is essentially a bond was the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches in previous generations. But in the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches today, this is no longer her theology.

To prove further that this change to the doctrine of faith is a calculated and deliberate and willful change on the part of Protestant Reformed ministers from what the Protestant Reformed Churches used to teach, I briefly point out that Reverend McGeown and Reverend Engelsma used to insist that faith is a bond.

Back in 2013 Reverend McGeown wrote the following:

In salvation, the Holy Spirit takes a sinner—who is like an old, dead, withered stick lying on the ground, severed from the only source of life—and He unites that sinner to Jesus Christ (John 15:1–2). The sinner certainly does not have any power of himself to unite himself to Jesus Christ. Nor, in fact, does the sinner even desire it. He is dead! The Holy Spirit gives to the sinner the life of Jesus Christ in uniting him or her to Jesus Christ.

We call that vital connection, bond or union *faith*.⁸

Reverend McGeown went on to write, "That aspect of faith is much neglected today by many who see faith simply as something we do."⁹ That is what Reverend McGeown used to teach. Now he teaches exactly what he condemned earlier—namely, that faith is only an act of man and that the creeds and scripture do not teach that faith is a bond. I say, then, that this change to the doctrine of faith is a calculated and deliberate and willful change.

Reverend Engelsma too in previous sermons on Lord's Day 7 insisted that faith is a living bond, a real union to Christ, so that he is *in* us and we are *in* him.¹⁰ Now Reverend Engelsma does not.

6 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1970), 1:305, 307, emphasis added.

7 Herman Hanko, *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 410–12, emphasis added.

8 Martyn McGeown, "Belgic Confession, Article 22; Day 4: Faith Keeping Us In Communion with Christ," *Limerick Reformed Blog*, June 29, 2013, <https://www.limerickreformed.com/blog/2013/06/29/belgic-confession-articles-22-23-faith-and-justification>.

9 Martyn McGeown, "Belgic Confession, Article 22; Day 4: Faith Keeping Us In Communion with Christ."

10 For example, Joshua Engelsma, "Living Faith in Christ," sermon preached in Crete Protestant Reformed Church on November 14, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1114212249346929>.

The Reason

Now the question is, why? Why such a calculated and deliberate and willful change to what the PRC has taught from the beginning?

It is my judgment that this departure from the truth is God's judgment upon a denomination that has been clamoring for more of man's activity in her theology. God is giving the denomination over to her proud lusting for more of man's responsibility in the preaching and, consequently, over to her rejection of the absolute sovereignty of God to bestow salvation according to his decree of election and the perfect sufficiency of the cross of Jesus Christ. The Protestant Reformed ministers pay lip service to the sovereignty of God and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, but they eagerly develop the idea that the covenant is a mutually dependent relationship of God with man, so that there is a mutual interplay and interdependence between God's blessings and man's activities.

This departure from the truth of the doctrine of faith is not at all surprising. This change to the doctrine of faith is simply the evil fruit of what the PRC has been working toward for years.

You really need to trace this recent development back to what Rev. Kenneth Koole, an emeritus minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches, wrote in the *Standard Bearer* in 2018.¹¹ Reverend Koole despised the doctrine of faith taught in a sermon by Rev. Herman Hoeksema on the Philippian jailor in Acts 16.

You will recall that the Philippian jailor, shaken to the core of his existence by all that had transpired in the middle of the night, cried out to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Paul and Silas declared, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Reverend Hoeksema rightly interpreted the essence of their response as this: "Do nothing! But believe."¹² That believing was a doing nothing to be saved. That believing was a resting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, who came to the jailor in Philippi through the apostles and through the earthquake and who himself spoke in that call of the gospel.

But Reverend Koole despised that exegesis of Reverend Hoeksema on Acts 16 and called it "nonsense." For

Reverend Koole, the jailor asked what *he must do*. And the apostle responded, here is what *you must do*. And the jailor did what *he must do*. Reverend Koole insisted that there was an activity of man that was necessary to perform before the jailor enjoyed his salvation. And that jailor did what he was supposed to do.

Now, Reverend Koole's article caused quite a stir within the Protestant Reformed Churches in 2018 and in 2019. Rev. Nathan Langerak and Rev. Andrew Lanning and Rev. Martin VanderWal and even Prof. David Engelsma all wrote into the *Standard Bearer* to criticize Reverend Koole's mockery of the truth of faith. But the PRC continued her agenda to make faith what man does for salvation, to make faith all about man's activity and man's responding to the preaching of the gospel.

A few months later Reverend McGeown quickly came to Reverend Koole's defense by publishing an article in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* to emphasize the activity of believing and to belittle the idea that faith is a bond. McGeown wrote,

While it is true that God works faith and repentance in us...*we still believe and repent.*¹³

And further, he wrote,

The call to faith in the gospel comes to every sinner. That call came to the Jews in Acts 2:37-41, and they obeyed that call, believed, and were baptized; and that call came to the jailor of Philippi in Acts 16:30-34, and he obeyed that call, believed, was baptized, and rejoiced with his household. They did those things by the grace of God, but they still *did* them. They did not sit idly waiting for God to save them—they heard the call to repent and believe and received the "end of their faith, even the salvation of [their] souls" (I Peter 1:9).¹⁴

Oh, Reverend McGeown at that time would talk about faith as a bond. But this speaking about faith as a bond was already a ploy to cover what McGeown really wanted to say: that faith is activity, activity, activity of man, man, man. And that drive in the Protestant

11 Kenneth Koole, "What Must I Do...?", *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 6-9.

12 The Spirit makes a clear disjunction between what the jailor asked in verse 30 and how the apostles responded in verse 31. Literally, the jailor asked, "What is necessary for me to do in order to be saved?" In other words, "I wish to be saved from my sin and death. Shall I offer God a sacrifice? Shall I give him a gift? What can I do? What must I do? What is necessary for me to do?" *But* they said, "Believe." That *but* is proper. There is a Greek *de* at the beginning of verse 31. A "but" could be substituted for the "and" in the text without any injustice. Yea, the text demands it. By this little conjunction "but," the Spirit teaches that there is nothing to do. Everything for salvation has already been accomplished. Is this not what the name *Jesus* signifies? Indeed, over against the insistence that the apostles required a doing, we respond, "Do nothing, but believe!"

13 Martyn McGeown, "Faith: A Bond, a Gift, *and* an Activity, but *Not* a Condition for Salvation," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 52, no. 2 (April 2019): 6, emphasis is his.

14 Martyn McGeown, "Faith: A Bond, a Gift, *and* an Activity, but *Not* a Condition for Salvation," 9 emphasis is his.

Reformed Churches to make faith all about man's activity and not at all that living bond with Jesus Christ was strengthened.

The next major push for the rejection of faith as a bond came after the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches out of the Protestant Reformed Churches. That next major push for the rejection of faith as a bond came in connection with a Reformed Protestant doctrine class in late 2021 on the topic of passive faith. In this class Reverend Lanning taught that the faith that justifies and the faith that saves is a passive faith.

And that is very true. Faith is passive because faith only receives the fullness of salvation from Jesus Christ. Faith gives nothing for that salvation. Faith offers nothing for that salvation. Faith does not offer even its own believing for that salvation. Faith only receives Christ and all his fullness. This idea of faith does not deny that faith is most vigorous activity, the activity of the believer's whole soul. But this activity of faith is of an entirely different sort. It is the activity of doing nothing for salvation but resting in Christ and receiving his fullness.

And I note in passing that the Protestant Reformed fathers were not afraid to speak of faith as passive. Here is a quote from Reverend Hoeksema, commenting on Lord's Day 7:

Notice that faith here is the spiritual means or, as it is often called, the instrument, whereby we are ingrafted, incorporated (*ingelijfd, einverleibt*) into Christ. This is an entirely passive notion. Man has nothing to do with it.¹⁵

But this teaching of passive faith was called heresy off the pulpit by one Protestant Reformed minister. I know this because I was in that Protestant Reformed church when the truth of passive faith was called heresy. Reverend Mahtani preached,

It is explicitly denied [by the Reformed Protestant Churches] that faith, the instrument through which we are justified, is an active faith. It is said instead that that faith is completely passive or utterly passive. While that sounds like a wonderful defense of gracious justification, this is heresy.¹⁶

And once again Reverend McGeown quickly rose up to condemn the whole idea of passive faith in a blog

post.¹⁷ There was one statement in particular made by Reverend Lanning that Reverend McGeown found very odd. Reverend Lanning said, "When we are talking about [faith as] the instrument of our justification, we are still talking about what God does."¹⁸ That statement quickly caught the attention of Reverend McGeown. It was strange to him to think of faith as "what God does."

That statement caught Reverend McGeown's attention because for him faith is all about man's activity. Faith is activity. It is activity. It is activity. Reverend McGeown went on at length in the same blog post to defend faith as man's activity. Faith, though a gift of God and wrought by the Holy Spirit, must be presented, according to Reverend McGeown, as an act of man.

So it becomes clear that this departure from the truth of the doctrine of faith in the Protestant Reformed Churches is not at all surprising. This change to the doctrine of faith is simply the evil fruit of what the Protestant Reformed denomination has been pushing toward for years. If you gut faith of its essence as the living bond whereby the elect sinner is engrafted into Jesus Christ, then all you are left with is man's activity. And that is exactly for what the PRC has been clamoring. This new doctrine denies the bond of faith *in order to* emphasize the necessity of man's activity in salvation and *in order to* exclude any passivity of man in being saved by faith.

What do the Protestant Reformed Churches teach concerning faith? This: God gives man his activity of believing, but this activity is man's, not God's. God gives faith only to the elect, but man must first exercise his faith to enjoy salvation. Man is passive in his regeneration, but man is never passive in faith. Man is united to Christ, but this union is most definitely not faith. Faith is *not* a bond. Faith is *only* man's activity of believing. Faith is that which man *must* do, and without man's doing it, there is no salvation.

I say, this is the state of theology in the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches: Man's activity. Man's activity. Man's activity.

Refutation

But now as a refutation of this new doctrine of faith proposed by the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches, let me substitute her new theology of faith into various passages of the creeds and of scripture. Let me substitute the PRC's doctrine that faith is fundamentally man's

15 Herman Hoeksema, "As to Conditions," *Standard Bearer* 26, no. 2 (October 15, 1949): 28.

16 Jonathan Mahtani, "Justification Sola Fide," sermon preached in Hope Protestant Reformed Church on October 31, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=12521184623194>.

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

18 Andy Lanning, "Passive Faith," doctrine class in First Reformed Protestant Church, November 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I25DNf9qFwk&t=3654s>.

activity of believing for the word *faith* in some passages, and ask yourself, does this sound Reformed at all?

Here is Lord's Day 25, question and answer 65: "Since then we are made partakers of Christ and all His benefits by *our activity of believing* only, whence does this faith proceed?"

Here is Belgic Confession, article 22: "And *man's activity of believing* is an instrument that keeps us in communion with [Christ] in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins."

Here is Ephesians 3:14–17: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that Christ may dwell in your hearts by *your activity of believing*."

Here is Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by *my activity of believing on* the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

And of course, here is Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace are ye saved through *your activity of believing*."

Now faith is certainly an activity. We do not minimize this activity. Faith is an activity of the whole man. Faith involves the faculties of man's soul: his mind and his will. But faith is a wholly different kind of activity, that of receiving everything from Christ and not giving anything to Christ.

What we do not allow is for faith's activity to push into the background that faith is a real, spiritual union with the Lord Jesus Christ. This idea of union with Jesus Christ is where the Catechism *begins* in Lord's Day 7. Where do you begin with faith? You begin with the truth that faith is union with Christ. You begin with the truth that saving faith is a bond to Jesus Christ. That is the essence of faith. Just as the essence of a horse is what a horse really is, so the essence of faith is that we are united to Jesus Christ. Those elect children of God who perished in Adam are saved when they "are ingrafted into Christ by a true faith." That is the Reformed faith that is rooted in the Reformed standards.

Our understanding of faith must not be this (and now I am describing the preaching to you as you would hear it in the Protestant Reformed Churches): God in the preaching of the gospel gives you grace, God brings you the gospel and works in your hearts by the operation of the Spirit, but you must believe.

No, our understanding of faith is this: you *will* believe. If you are a child of God and you come under the preaching of the gospel, then faith can do *nothing else* but hear and trust and rely upon Jesus Christ. Why? Because the faith that hears and trusts and relies upon Jesus Christ is the very same faith that has already united the believer to Jesus Christ!

And this truth of faith is of utmost comfort for the child of God. That bond of faith, according to God's covenant promise, is established even with little infants in the womb. The life of Christ is in the child even before he or she does anything spiritual. That little child is as much a partaker of salvation as adults are with all their thinking and willing and doing. As the baptism form says, the little infants are *sanctified* in Christ. How is that possible? They did not know anything. They were not assured of anything. Where is their activity of faith? But they are sanctified in Christ because they are sanctified by faith. They are sanctified in Christ because they have a real, spiritual union with Christ by faith.

This truth of faith means that the person who lies on the hospital bed as a vegetable with no brain activity whatsoever is as much a partaker of salvation as you and I. What can such a person do for salvation? What believing can such a person do? Yet Christ is in him by faith.

And since the strength of that bond is not you but the almighty Lord, the Spirit of Christ, the Lord and author of faith, *nothing* can separate you from the love of Christ. Faith cannot fail. Men may fail but not faith. Faith is not weak. Men are weak but not faith.

Conclusion

And what now shall we say about the state of theology in the century-old Protestant Reformed Churches? This: by her doctrine of faith, the century-old Protestant Reformed denomination no longer teaches about the sovereign God who infallibly accomplishes his good pleasure in his elect and in all the world. The PRC pays lip service to the sovereignty and good pleasure of God, but by her doctrine of faith she teaches a god who engages in a mutually dependent relationship with man, so that there is a mutual interplay and interdependence between God's blessings and man's activities. By her doctrine of faith, the PRC teaches a different god. By her doctrine of faith, the PRC manifests her whole theology. By her doctrine of faith, the PRC manifests that she has forsaken the cause of Jesus Christ and has become fundamentally antichristian.

It is very clear by this calculated and deliberate and willful change to the doctrine of faith that God is judging the Protestant Reformed Churches and giving the denomination further and further over to her folly. God is hurling the PRC down the road of apostasy. So we urgently warn those in the churches of her pernicious ways. We call them to repent and call them to join us where Christ maintains and Christ develops the Reformed truth by his grace and Holy Spirit.

—LB

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

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PHILIPPINE CHURCHES? (3): BULACAN CHURCH BECOMES REFORMED PROTESTANT

The Preceding Events

On May 2, 2021, the council of the then Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan called me to its meeting to explain the doctrinal controversy that was happening in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRC). I was persuaded by Reverend Flores to speak. Given that he was present at the meeting and could speak more effectively on the matter, I was not sure why I needed to be there. I was hesitant to attend the meeting, as the minister and elders were supposed to teach the members concerning the doctrinal dispute about the covenant. Furthermore, I had made it very clear in my letter of concern that I sent on March 16 precisely what the PRC's issue was, and Reverend Flores' meeting with myself and other concerned men on April 25 was sufficient for him to understand the crux of the dispute. Besides, it had been only a week since that meeting.

Nevertheless, I attended the meeting, hoping to instruct the officebearers on what was happening in the Protestant Reformed Churches. I hoped that Jesus Christ would cause in our hearts the desire for true reformation upon realizing that the PRC was in error and that she continued to develop her lies. The council members all agreed that the PRC was in error. They all agreed that David Overway's conditional sermons warranted his deposition and that any other minister who sympathized and used the same conditional language was worthy of deposition as well. I can still remember the council members' emotions and sentiments at the classis meeting the week before. They were furious that the chairman of that classis, Reverend Ibe, did not consider the request of Reverend Flores to assign a study committee to address the doctrinal controversy in the PRC. The withdrawal letter that the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan sent

to the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP) clearly expresses this resentment of the council.¹

However, such negative sentiments toward the PRCP were never due to the PRC's doctrinal errors nor to the PRCP's apparently intentional silence regarding the controversy in the PRC. I knew that for certain, since Reverend Flores had met with Professor Dykstra on March 4, 2021, together with the Contact Committee of the PRCP, after the formation of First Reformed Protestant Church (Michigan). At that meeting Reverend Flores was persuaded that the formation of First church had been planned with the support of the rich in the congregation. Reverend Flores personally believed that First's secession in 2021 was a schism led by Reverend Lanning and supported by the wealthy members. Reverend Flores openly made this assertion to a few young men, including myself. The point is that Reverend Flores and the Bulacan council used the controversy between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC), not doctrine, as an opportunity to break with the PRCP. The situation in the American churches presented an opportunity while doctrine was set aside. If doctrine had not been set aside, attempts would have been made to address the doctrinal issues once Bulacan officially became a Reformed Protestant church.

I knew that the Bulacan council would agree with my presentation because the men were prejudiced against the PRCP. In fact there was an operating prejudice even before the organization of the PRCP. One could always sense that the then Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan could rupture ties with the PRCP at any time.

Reverend Flores was very vocal about this also. Reverend Flores bragged about how he and his church had once benefited in some way from a Reformed Presbyterian

¹ Withdrawal of Membership of the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan from the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18bzNLBzVmmVP1ygdA5JGRBe2TRDBJy77/view?usp=sharing>.

church and that he had received an open invitation to join the denomination. He also said that accepting an invitation to join the Reformed Presbyterian denomination was always an option. Honestly, if it were not for the split between the PRC and RPC, his church would have been in the Reformed Presbyterian denomination, since he always had grudges against the PRCP, especially against the Protestant Reformed missionaries. His resentments were always expressed publicly among the council members and young people. We were exposed to many resentments, and we developed suspicions about the missionaries. He fueled rising, serious suspicions that were inevitably built upon his words and solely by his words.

A week after the meeting with the Bulacan council, Reverend Flores and the elders went to visit a fellowship in Manila. The fellowship was under the care of his mother-in-law, who had been the pastor there before she became interested in joining her son-in-law in his church. Reverend Flores and the elders went to Manila to persuade the fellowship to join in the withdrawal of Bulacan's membership from the PRCP on May 16. As expected, the fellowship agreed to join the movement.

On May 10 Reverend Flores met with the steering committee of the official mission work of the PRCP in Albueva, Leyte, and he went to Santa Cruz, Laguna, the next day. He met the steering committee of Leyte via an online conference video call. The purpose was to secure the mission work for Bulacan and her withdrawal on May 16 from the PRCP. Without the presence of his consistory and consent from the mission committee of the PRCP, Reverend Flores gathered the Leyte steering committee and convinced its members of the doctrinal controversy in the PRC.

I can assure the reader that the steering committee of Leyte was ignorant of the controversy at the May 10 meeting because after First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan was formed, Reverend Flores, seminarian Joseph Escalaw, and myself visited the Leyte mission in 2022 and asked the members about many points of doctrine, both evangelical and Reformed. The members not only were ignorant of the ongoing doctrinal dispute, but they also were ignorant of the Reformed faith. Even though the fellowship was already *fifteen* years old when we visited, straightforward inquiries about the fundamentals of the Reformed faith were still barely addressed accurately by the regular attendees without traces of Arminianism, or worse, mysticism. So it was really a surprise that First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan organized the fellowship as an instituted church on September 11, 2022. To be fair, the members of the fellowship were very interested in the Reformed faith. But one must speak their language to communicate to them the

Reformed faith, and they can hardly understand Tagalog, the common dialect in the Philippines. Most of them are very poor and uneducated, so they easily could be persuaded and dragged along. The point is that the members followed blindly the voice of Reverend Flores, who is very revered in Bulacan as the infallible pope. So it is no wonder that when he met with the Leyte steering committee, the members of the fellowship blindly agreed to join the upcoming withdrawal from the PRCP as an official mission of First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan, though the people evidently did not understand what was going on.

Three days later Reverend Flores and the Contact Committee of the PRCP met with Reverend Lanning, the pastor of First Reformed Protestant Church. I had asked Reverend Lanning for an informal meeting as requested by the committee.

Before all these meetings happened—that is, all the meetings that came after the April 25 meeting with Reverend Flores and before the May 16 withdrawal of the Bulacan church from the PRCP—I had sent an email to Reverend Lanning regarding financial support, which I admit was done after repeated requests of Reverend Flores. Reverend Flores was worried about the welfare of the poorest in the congregation and the mission work in Leyte. My email was sent not without hesitation and shame, since money should never be a consideration when pursuing a reformation. Regrettably, I emailed the following to Reverend Lanning on May 6, 2021:

I just want to ask if the FRPC [First Reformed Protestant Church] is very willing to help the PRCB [Protestant Reformed Church of Bulacan] if ever we decide to come out from the PRCP. Your response to this can help the PRCB consistory big time in their plan to separate from their mother church. The plan is, before the June Classis, the consistory will lead the faithful saints in the PRCB to come out from the PRCP. And immediately, the consistory will establish a relationship with the federation of the RPC.

When the reverend responded positively, then all the succeeding events led enthusiastically to the split from our mother, the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines.

The Breaking with Mother

The members of the Bulacan church signed an Act of Separation on Sunday, May 16, 2021, after the afternoon worship service and after additional officebearers had been installed. The Protestant Reformed missionaries viewed the installation of these officebearers immediately

before Bulacan's withdrawal as suspicious, as the men who were installed had recently joined Bulacan from the Provident and Berean churches. A letter signed by the seven officebearers, expressing Bulacan's withdrawal from the PRCP, was sent that day as well to the stated clerk of the PRCP classis.

After a short explanation of the doctrinal controversy and the necessity to secede, questions were received from the members. Few questions were brought up, most of which were characterized by practical implications of the secession. Only a few members threw doctrinal queries at the council, which suggested that only a few understood the very reason for the secession. Only a few were interested in the real reason for the split from the PRCP. The quality of the secession is clearly seen in our withdrawal letter, wherein the first ground is a shallow and hasty presentation and defense of the truth. Ground one reads,

The doctrine of good works is a vital aspect in the life of a redeemed child of God as a manifestation and fruits of faith and gratitude for such great gift of salvation wrought through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 24). However, good works must have its proper place in doctrine. Otherwise, it militates against the pure teaching of the gospel of God (Justification by faith alone). Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 32) teaches the necessity of good works in the life of the redeemed people of God. A saved, justified sinner must perform good works. That is, in the newness of life, a believer lives, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit of Christ, sincerely willing and ready unto Jehovah (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 1, Q&A 1). But the controversy is this: "The doctrinal error is that the believer's good works are given a place and function that is out of harmony with the Reformed confessions" (Acts of Synod 2018, 61, art. 62.B.1). We strongly reject, according to Scripture and the Reformed creeds, that good works are given a place and function in such a way that those works serve as necessary conditions in prayer-filled life, assurance of salvation, and experiencing the fellowship with God in the covenant.²

The first ground is a mere, general statement about good works. The ground does not explain how the PRC uses the requirement of good works to sever the people of God from the finished work of Jesus Christ. The ground does not explain how the PRC teaches good works in a

way that they become a means to receive covenant blessings. The ground does not expose the inconsistency of the PRC in her decisions at Synod 2018. Although the PRC identified the doctrinal error, her writings after taking up that stance for the truth are opposed to the truth. Also, the ground should have reflected the spiritual union between the PRC and the PRCP. As sister churches, when one church corrupts the gospel, the other shares in it. The ground confined the controversy to the PRC, when the controversy should also have been the PRCP's controversy by virtue of their sister-church relationship, especially because the matter concerned the gospel of the covenant of grace.

The ground lacks sharpness and precision. It betrays the true purpose of the secession—that is, just to separate from the PRCP and to find greener pastures somewhere else.

If I were to rewrite the first ground, I would put it this way:

Synod 2018 has already declared the lie of man's acquiring something from God by good works, and in doing that the synod also declared such a notion an error. Nevertheless, man has not been killed. Man is free in the PRC, lurking to see who will cling to him for experience in the covenant and for advice in the preaching, writing, and meetings of the minor and broader assemblies. The theology of man is being promoted in the pulpits of your sister and even in her broader assemblies. But no one is being disciplined, except those who faithfully preach and develop the unconditional covenant of grace both in its objective aspect and in its subjective aspect. The PRC is hunting down Jesus Christ by putting despite in his gospel. She despises that the establishment, maintenance, and consummation of God's covenant rest solely in the sovereign, determinative counsel of God and not in any way in man, though man is claimed to be assisted by God's grace. Clearly your sister is not for truth but for lies. Man is very much alive, both in the PRC's doctrine and in her special offices. This alone must be sufficient to separate from her; and you, our mother, share in her sin and errors by silently approving every activity of your sister. You must repent in sackcloth and ashes. You must believe solely in the finished work of Jesus Christ and not in man, no matter how persistent you are to put him in high places. I ask you, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye

² Withdrawal of Membership of the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan from the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines, 1.

now made perfect by the flesh” (Gal. 3:3)? Moreover, “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith” (v. 11).

To live by faith is to be united with Jesus Christ; to live by faith is to acquire nothing from God by works; to live by faith is to trust only the merits of Jesus Christ. The PRC, your sister, is clearly against this truth and is attempting to sever the church from her head by twisting the truth of the covenant with subtle speech.

We commit ourselves to the truth; therefore, this ground shall suffice as our reason for seceding from you. Repent, therefore, for no man shall save you from your sin. “And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee” (Deut. 28:29).

This ground should be enough. No need for grounds two and three. The other grounds are unnecessary because they only underscore the doctrinal concerns raised and their unavoidable effect on the hearts of those who believe the gospel. If the newly formed First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan was truly convicted of the truth, her document of secession indeed should have consistently spoken the same. But because her secession was not due to doctrinal matters, her withdrawal letter will rot in the pages of Reformed Protestant history.

Spiritual Lethargy

First Reformed Protestant Church of Bulacan became a laughingstock because of her withdrawal from the PRCP. Everyone was puzzled why the church left. One might wonder why people were puzzled. But after one reads Bulacan’s withdrawal letter, then one realizes that it was her fault that people were confused. Also, the council decided to be silent. Afraid of criticism? Yes. Cowards? Absolutely. The council decided not to respond even to the accusations of Berean Protestant Reformed Church.

Many men rightly asserted that the reason for Bulacan’s secession was not doctrinal. For instance, Rev. William Langerak contended that the main reason for the secession was money.³ This contention was based on

information relayed to him by the Protestant Reformed missionaries in the Philippines. Another assertion was Rev. Daniel Holstege’s report regarding the split in which he commented that the reason for the split was “not purely a doctrinal matter.”⁴ Reverend Holstege even assured the audience that there was a lot more to Bulacan’s secession than the claim of reformation. He had worked closely with the churches in the Philippines, and he knew that there was always a chasm among the churches. *He was right—the reason for the split was not a purely doctrinal matter; it was a purely political and financial matter.*

Compared to the Act of Separation and Reformation signed by like-minded believers in America to separate from the PRC, Bulacan’s document of secession was nothing but a shallow and hasty presentation of the Reformed faith. The truth of the unconditional covenant was not developed and defended, much less the truth of justification by faith alone. Moreover, the document had nothing against the Protestant Reformed Churches. Bulacan did not declare anathema against the PRC and the PRCP. What she did was to bless the PRCP instead, by saying,

The fellowship we experienced in this denomination will remain precious in our hearts as the redeemed in Jesus Christ. We will continue to cherish the pleasant memories we had together.⁵

There was no condemnation, no calling the churches to repent of their errors. This is exactly what Reverend Flores wanted: to remain in fellowship with the PRCP and to keep the bridge between the denomination and the Bulacan church. Such an absurd desire for communion with the false church or with those who despise the gospel contradicted his March 21, 2021, sermon on Galatians 3:1–3, when he said,

The apostle Paul does not say that you maintain your fellowship with them [false teachers] and be patient with them; they might change [their position]. The apostle says, “Let him be a curse!”⁶

That Reverend Flores wanted to remain in fellowship with the PRCP and that Bulacan did not call the PRCP to repentance partly explain why the officebearers and members of Bulacan were so stagnant and sluggish in defending and developing the truth of the unconditional

3 William Langerak, “An Outline of Synod 2021,” presentation given at Trinity Protestant Reformed Church on June 20, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__WZxRz6j2s.

4 Daniel Holstege, presentation on the PRC’s mission work in the Philippines given at Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church on May 23, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMiCfK-KcAM>.

5 Withdrawal of Membership of the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan from the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines, 2.

6 John Flores, “A Bewitched Church with False Doctrine is Mark of Foolishness in the Sight of the Lord,” sermon preached in the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan on March 21, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=438499577257809&rcid=0tYBLnc4KKZRYRDZ, translation is mine.

covenant over against the errors of the PRC. There were no articles or doctrinal lectures; there was no sharp preaching against error or engaging in doctrinal discussions with the PRCP. There was total silence in the newly formed Reformed Protestant church in the Philippines. So, to break the silence, I wrote a letter to the school committee to ask the committee to host a theological conference, which would help “to educate the people of God here and abroad about the truth.”⁷ The request was to have the three ministers of the RPC to speak primarily about God’s covenant, kingdom, and church. But the request was deemed unnecessary. I received no response from the school committee.

After months of waiting, the members of the Bulacan church still did not receive any doctrinal instruction. A few of us depended on the lectures, articles, and sermons from the RPC. So on May 14, 2022, I initiated a discussion about the controversy⁸ with some other

members of our church, hoping to pique their interest and to encourage them to continue to follow the doctrinal controversy.

Following the breakup with her mother, the PRCP, First Reformed Protestant Church in Bulacan became extremely lethargic in her doctrine but fervent in her requests for meeting after meeting with the RPC regarding financial support for the Philippines.

Indeed, this word of God is for us, the then First Reformed Protestant Church in Bulacan: “As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets” (Jer. 2:26). We were found lacking, and we are ashamed. We would be found out quickly when the controversy on baptism shook our church, which eventually led to another split in June 2022.

I will conclude this series next time, the Lord willing.

—JP

RUNNING FOOTMEN

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

THE NO OF THE YES

Alongside the recovery of the pure preaching of the gospel in the Reformed Protestant Churches has been a recovery of the doctrine of the antithesis. The two go together and cannot be separated. To lose the gospel is also to lose the antithesis. It is a horrible thing as a child of God to languish in a church where the pure doctrine of the gospel is not preached and the lie of the willing and working of man takes over. It becomes even more painful when surrounded by fellow church members who are doctrinally indifferent, where proper church discipline becomes almost nonexistent or turned against the righteous, and when the members do not lose their lives for Christ’s sake and the gospel’s, but they “gain the whole world” (Mark 8:36).

Article 29 of the Belgic Confession establishes the

connection between the marks of the true church and the antithesis. States article 29:

The marks by which the true church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 62)

While the word *antithesis* does not appear in article 29 and neither is the word found in the scriptures or the Reformed confessions, the *doctrine* of the antithesis shouts in article 29. There is the *yes* of the three marks that “all things are managed according to the pure Word of God,” and the *no* of the *yes* “that all things contrary

7 Letter to the School Committee, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18viilaaBDmd8GzeBk94pBvSVPag5tVmA/view?usp=sharing>.

8 RPC and PRC Controversy Discussion Outline, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wuvAJSSayVjBUPCWV22zF5jx1c6rUAG2/view?usp=sharing>. The video of the discussion in Tagalog can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGMis2SNnYQ>.

thereto [are] rejected.” With respect to the members of the church, there is the *yes* of faith in Jesus Christ as the only savior: following after righteousness and loving the true God and their neighbors. And there is the *no* of the *yes*: avoiding sin, not turning aside to the right or the left, and crucifying the flesh with the works thereof. The antithesis becomes the sharpest at the time of church reformation when the false church, “[relying] more upon men than upon Christ,” persecutes the antithetical witness of “those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 62–64).

Prof. Homer Hoeksema (HCH), a longtime editor of the *Standard Bearer*, wrote frequently on the topic of the antithesis. HCH became a pastor in the Protestant Reformed Churches while the covenant controversy of the late 1940s and early 1950s was coming to a head. He had a front-row seat to the corruption of the gospel by those who maintained a conditional covenant, and he witnessed a breakdown of the antithesis as pastor in Doon, Iowa, as one who attended the church assemblies, and as a frequent contributor to the *Standard Bearer*. His understanding of the antithesis and his explanation of it were forged in the fires of doctrinal controversy and unethical behavior on the part of the enemies of the gospel.

The December 1, 1985, issue of the *Standard Bearer* was a special issue devoted to the topic “The Antithesis.” HCH, who by then was nearly sixty-two years old and nearing the end of his life, penned the editorial “Thesis and Antithesis.” It is a thoroughly doctrinal explanation of the antithesis, summarizing his mature development of the doctrine. Interested readers are encouraged to read his editorial on the subject, as well as *Standard Bearer* articles by Herman Hoeksema and Marinus Schipper on the topic.

Wrote HCH,

There are three terms which are related and which commonly enter into any discussion of the idea of the antithesis. They are: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. As you will readily see, the terms *antithesis* and *synthesis* have in them the term *thesis*. The terms are clearly related, therefore. We may begin with the term *thesis*. *Thesis* means “that which is put, established, asserted to be the truth.” It is a positive affirmation. It is the *Yes*. The term *antithesis* is formed by prefixing the term *anti-* and very simply it signifies “that which is opposed, a denial.” It is the *No*.

The term *synthesis* is formed by prefixing the term *syn-*, which means “together with,” so that the word denotes a “putting together, that which is put together, a combination.” It is an attempt at a *Yes-No*, or a *No-Yes*.¹

First, it must be understood that “the thesis is the Word of God concerning Himself.”² God reveals himself as “eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good” (Belgic Confession 1, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 23). In God there is light and no darkness. He is the God of truth and not the lie. He is the God of righteousness, not unrighteousness. About himself God says yes!

Further, we must understand the thesis in light of the people to whom God reveals himself: his elect, chosen children, those with whom he establishes his covenant. They are the people in this sinful world who have been called out. They are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that [they] should show forth the praises of him who hath called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). They represent God’s cause in this world by their confessions of his truth, by their church membership, by the education of their children, in their employment and employing, in their marriages and rearing of their children, and in their relation to all authority. Every aspect of their lives testifies to the fact that they know God, love him, and confess him as the only good. They say *yes* of God and his will.

The antithesis comes to expression because God’s people dwell in a world of darkness and sin. This is not by accident. God willed this sin and darkness as the background against which he might reveal himself as the only light and as opposed to all darkness. He says yes to himself and no to all that opposes his light, truth, and righteousness. And God has placed his people in the middle of this wicked world so that they might say *yes* to God and *no* to all the darkness that opposes God. This hostility of God’s people to all the darkness of sin and the lie is established by God. Immediately after the fall of Adam, when Adam did not say *no* to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God declared to Satan, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

It is spiritually impossible for the child of God to say *yes* to the truth while at the same time remaining silent about the lie. For example, a believer cannot maintain

1 Homer C. Hoeksema, “Thesis and Antithesis,” *Standard Bearer* 62, no. 5 (December 1, 1985): 102.

2 Hoeksema, “Thesis and Antithesis,” 102.

the synthesis that all of salvation, which includes the experience of salvation, can at one and the same time be the result of both Christ's full and free gift and man's repentance upon which God is waiting. The antithesis demands that the believer condemn in no uncertain terms man's working for the experience of the remission of sins and salvation.

The *yes* of the child of God is God's work in us and through us. "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). So also the *no* of the *yes*. It is an inevitable *no*. In fact, the *yes* is proven to be a counterfeit unless it is accompanied by an equally vehement *no*! There is no neutrality in the life of the child of God. Neutrality reveals that one is carnal and has no part with God but is a citizen of the kingdom of this world. The *yes* of the child of God is always accompanied by the *no* of the *yes*!

So-called Reformed churches, where there is no gospel preached and where there has been radical departure from the Reformed confessions, are packed with people who make a big show of their counterfeit *yeses*. Yes, they love God. Yes, they love their neighbors. Yes, they love marriage. Yes, God saves by grace alone. Yes, yes, yes. But, when you examine their lives, they are lives of synthesis with the wicked world and false church in every respect. The people do not lose their lives for Christ's sake and the gospel's, but they gain the whole world under the guise of being Reformed Christians. Absent is the *no* of the *yes*.

A few examples will demonstrate.

How many of us have not heard a sermon preached by a Protestant Reformed minister on the doctrine of marriage? We heard that marriage is a lifelong bond. Only the death of one spouse breaks that bond. God hates putting away. Marriage is a picture of the relation between Christ and his church. All of these are clear expressions of the truth of God's word, a *yes* to the truth of God as he has revealed it in his word. And then you find out that the very man who preached the sermon keeps company with his divorced and remarried brother at family gatherings, in direct violation of the clear teaching of 1 Corinthians 5:11: "I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator...with such an one no not to eat." Certainly, God would not require of that minister that he lose the fellowship of his brother. And the members of the congregation who sat under the sermon, and evidently agreed with it, attend the weddings of those unbiblically remarrying, have very cozy relationships with fornicating children and with the divorced and remarried, and refuse to put them out of their fellowship. The *yeses* of the minister and the members are proven to be shams

because there are no *nos* to their *yeses*. Their professed beliefs in God's will for marriage are exposed as empty by their delight in fellowship with adulterous God-haters. They refuse to rebuke their impenitent friends and relatives. Their delight is not in fellowship with God and his people but in hobnobbing with the impenitent. If you rebuke them and ask them why they refuse to say *no*, they become furiously angry with you. They set themselves as your enemies and condemn you as being arrogant and unloving. No antithesis.

How many of us have not attended a Protestant Reformed meeting of classis or synod, read a transcript of a meeting, or heard a recording of one? Gross false doctrine has appeared many times on the agendas, with that false doctrine standing in stark opposition to the truth of God as he has revealed himself in his word. When is the last time you heard a resounding *yes* to God and his absolute sovereignty in salvation and an equally vehement *no* to man trying to insert his good works as the basis for experiencing that salvation? Have you witnessed the antithesis or synthesis? When have you heard or seen a man lose his life for Christ's sake on the floor of Classis East, defending not the honor and reputation of man but the glory of God in Jesus Christ in the complete work of salvation? When have you ever heard a delegate become indignant with the attacks upon the work of Christ and the sycophantic protection of man's honor and reputation and vehemently condemn the lie and put man in his proper place? Have you ever heard the *no* of the *yes*? No antithesis.

One is reminded of a sermon preached in many Protestant Reformed churches in the early 1990s by Prof. Herman Hanko titled "Men for the Times" and based on 1 Chronicles 12:32-33. Some of his observations in that sermon were prophetic of what would become of Protestant Reformed ecclesiastical assemblies in the future. Perhaps the "they" Hanko referred to were men that he had been observing at the ecclesiastical assemblies of the Protestant Reformed Churches back in the early 1990s. He preached that when

one man has the courage to stand up [in an ecclesiastical assembly] and say, "This is the truth; this is where we must stand!" they on the sidelines wring their hands and say, "Oh, don't rock the boat, don't rock the boat. What are you trying to do, bring trouble? What are you trying to do, bring unrest and confusion into the church? Don't be so sharp. Don't be so critical. Don't be so condemnatory. We have to...we have to live in peace. We have to live in quietness." And there they stand, carping and criticizing and making a

big fuss about it, because someone has the spiritual courage to stand up and be counted in the cause of the truth!³

No longer do men lose their lives for Christ's sake and the gospel's. There is the world to gain. And that takes the form of prestigious titles, comfortable housing and housing allowances, and the respect of a religious community. Do not rock the boat, stay in line, be a good lemming, and the money will keep coming your way. Follow the path of least resistance. No antithesis.

Finally, how many of us have not experienced the blatant disregard for the sword of Christ in families? We read in Matthew 10:34–39:

34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.
35. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.
36. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.
37. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.
39. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Would a Protestant Reformed minister dare to preach on this text? Would his elders tolerate it? Could the minister who preached a sermon faithfully on this text (which is no longer possible in the Protestant Reformed Churches) expect to make it across the church parking lot without being accosted and rebuked by church members for being so unloving and arrogant? There are election and reprobation in this text and God's decree of predestination as it cuts through families. There is in this text the absolute antithesis between the true church and the false church, members of each who are in the same family. The Christ in this text is the Christ who sovereignly wields a sword that cuts asunder the most intimate family ties. This text destroys the false notion that it is a Christian virtue to live synthetically and not antithetically.

To lose the gospel and the antithesis is a terrible thing. It is to become one with the false church and the world. God's word to his church is "Israel then shall dwell in safety alone" (Deut. 33:28). HCH, in a 1951 article in the *Standard Bearer*, referred to this as the "principle of Christian isolation."⁴ In the New Testament the apostle Paul spoke to the believers in Christ in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18:

14. Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?
15. And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?
16. And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
17. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,
18. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

To be sure, God causes his true church to dwell in safety alone. He calls his people out of darkness and brings them into the light. God puts in their hearts a love for his truth and a contempt for the lie. He puts in their hearts a delight to fellowship with God's saints and to detest the company of those who love and speak lies. God works in their hearts so that they are willing to lose all things for Christ's sake and the gospel's. And God causes them to dwell in peace, not with this world but with the Lord Jesus Christ as pilgrims and strangers in this evil world.

It is a glorious privilege to live the antithesis. Will all men speak well of you? No. Will you gain the world? No. But you have Christ. And if you have Christ, you have everything.

—Aaron J. Cleveland

3 Herman Hanko, "Men for the Times," sermon preached in Hope Protestant Reformed Church on July 9, 1995, <https://www.prc.org/resources/sermons/audio/message/men-for-the-times>.

4 Homer C. Hoeksema, "Back to School," *Standard Bearer* 28, no. 3 (November 1, 1951): 66.

REFORMED BELIEVERS PUBLISHING

2024 ANNUAL MEETING

Start making plans to attend the 2024 annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP). The Lord willing, this will be the fifth annual meeting of our intrepid organization. God be praised for raising up and preserving the witness of RBP and *Sword and Shield*, the free paper that RBP publishes. The witness of *Sword and Shield* continues to shine as a bright light amid the darkness of the “falling away” (2 Thess. 2:3).

Once again, the annual meeting will be held at Wonderland Tire Company located at 1 84th Street SW, Byron Center, Michigan. The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, October 18. Parents and children alike are encouraged to attend the meeting to hear the edifying and inspiring speeches and to enjoy rich communion of the saints with like-minded believers who are committed to the glorious privilege of publishing the truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Delicious refreshments will be served after the meeting.

This year Rev. Tyler Ophoff, pastor of First Reformed Protestant Church, will be the keynote speaker on the topic “The Antithesis and Common Grace.” The Lord willing, Rev. Luke Bomers and Rev. Nathan Langerak

will also be present to make comments pertinent to the witness of *Sword and Shield*. There will also be comments from the president of RBP and reports from the board secretary and treasurer. Also the three new board members will be announced at this meeting.

The annual meeting is the yearly opportunity for new members to join Reformed Believers Publishing. Perhaps there are young men and women who have been thinking about joining or others who have read *Sword and Shield* for five years now and would like to join the organization that publishes the magazine. Now is your opportunity! To join RBP, please download the “membership request form” found at reformedbelieverspublishing.org/membership, fill out the form, and email it to office@reformedbelieverspublishing.org. As stated in the form, RBP allows two classes of members: regular members and associate members. Regular members must be male and have the right to vote at meetings and may be nominated for the board of RBP. Associate members may be male or female and are granted advisory votes at meetings. New membership requests will be voted on by email prior to the annual meeting, so send in your membership requests soon!



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Likewise also the cup after supper, saying,
This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. — Luke 22:20*

A beautiful cup is the cup of the Lord—a cup full of the good wine that God made through the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and a cup that fills the soul with the shed blood of Jesus Christ. That shed blood washes away all sins and gives the joy and gladness of heaven and eternal life. That blood was shed for you. And that blood sealed the promise of the covenant of God as yes and amen. There is no good thing that God has promised that Jesus Christ did not make sure and certain through the shedding of his blood.

The testament that Jesus confirmed by the shedding of his blood is the new one. The old one was a covenant of law. Oh, not that it was not part of the one, eternal covenant of grace, but its administration was the old letter of the law that killed and was the ministration of death. The law was added to the promise that God made to Abraham. The law made sin exceeding sinful, so that transgressions abounded and that the grace of God might much more abound. The law made all who came under it sinners and threatened every sinner with eternal desolation. Cursed is *everyone* who continues not in *all* things that are written in the law to do them. The law never said, “Be decent persons, try your hardest, do your best, or do better next time.” But the law said, “With all your hearts, minds, souls, and strength you must love the Lord your God.” In all that we failed. Not first ourselves! No, we came into the world under the condemnation of the law through our first father, Adam. We were born as sinners by nature, and daily we increase our debts.

Thus the law was a crushing weight that brought with it the terror of the wrath of God.

Jesus gave us a new testament. He is not another Moses who brings the law to rule over us again. Jesus freed us from the law! Yes, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ! He came to justify us from all things from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses. And Jesus gave us a new cup full of the good wine of his perfect salvation: justification from our sins and consecration to the living God in his fellowship. Yes, if you drink that cup, you not only receive the pardon of sins, but you also become more and more united to Christ’s sacred body! You are assured more and more of the forgiveness of your sins and of the promise of eternal life! You are filled with the Holy Ghost, who is that sweet wine that Christ pours into our souls to refresh us and by whom Christ as the head governs us, the members of his body! Drink that wine and taste heaven. The taste will transform you from glory to glory until in the new heaven and earth you drink that wine anew with Christ in the marriage supper of the Lamb and his bride. Such a sweet and lovely cup.

Yes, because Christ took another and terrible cup filled with the wrath of God against our transgressions of his law. When Christ took that cup into his hand, then a look into the cup nearly killed him. The terribleness of that cup pressed out of him a blood-sweat in the garden. The cup’s terror so sapped him of his strength that God sent angels to strengthen the Son of God. Submitting to God’s will and having taken the cup, Jesus drank it to the last swig of bitter vinegar that burned his parched lips and throat. Having cried with a loud voice, “It is finished!” he gave up the ghost. And that bitter cup was transformed into a cup full of the sweet wine of the Spirit! When we drink it, we show Christ’s death till he comes.

—NJL