

The background features a stylized, orange-toned illustration. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. To its right, a shield is depicted with a circular border and several smaller circles inside, representing rivets. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

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 CHRIST-LIFE

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. — Galatians 2:20–21

In the text and context, the apostle has in view and is combatting an opponent. The opponent charges that the doctrine of justification by faith alone ignores the law and makes men careless and profane. The opponent teaches that we are justified both by Christ and by our obedience.

The apostle is not guarding his doctrine of justification by faith alone from the charge that the doctrine makes men careless and profane. The apostle is not saying, “We are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ, and now I want you to understand that this does not mean that you may live however you want.”

But the apostle has his eye squarely on the opponent, who says,

Yes, Christ died for our sins. Yes, we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, but we must also keep the law. We have fellowship with God through Christ and in the way of our obedience. We have intimate communion with God through Christ and in the way of our good works. We have the forgiveness of sins through both faith and our repentance. The sinner must first repent, and then and only then is the sinner forgiven.

Christ *and* the sinner’s obedience, works, and repentance!

The opponent charges, perhaps not explicitly, for Satan has become more subtle,

Paul, your doctrine of justification by faith alone is an evil doctrine. You ignore the law. By your doctrine you make people ignore the law, and they will live licentiously.

The opponent defends his doctrine by saying,

I am only interested in the church’s holiness when I teach Christ and obedience, when I say that the way to God is Christ and one’s good works, when I say that fellowship with God is by Christ and

in the way of one’s good works. My only interests are that we do justice to the law, that we are concerned about the holiness of the church, and that the people of God live holy lives. When I say that the sinner first must repent and then and only then is he forgiven, I am only doing justice to the fact that God requires repentance of sinners.

By this the opponent charges that the gospel does not do those things, that the gospel neglects the holy life and repentance.

The apostle counters the opponent and his doctrine by saying,

If you believe in both Christ and the sinner for salvation; if you believe in Christ and your good works as the way to God; and if you think that you have fellowship with God by Christ and in the way of your obedience, then you make Christ the minister of sin. Then Christ actually did nothing. He did not die for your sins. He did not deliver you from your sins. Christ is the minister of sin.

Paul exposes in this that all who deny or compromise the doctrine of justification by faith alone teach a very wicked doctrine.

The apostle attacks the opponent further by saying,

The way to God is not Christ and your good works. Until you die to the law, you cannot be a holy person. It is impossible. Indeed, if you do not die to the law, then you become a very wicked person who attacks God and his law so that you can make a way to heaven and God’s fellowship and blessings for yourself. You must die to the law, so that the law cannot tell you, “You must keep me to live. You must keep me to be blessed. You must keep me to receive God’s blessings.”

To die to the law means that the law has no power to tell you that you must keep the law to live, to be blessed by God, to have God's fellowship, or to enter heaven. Further, to die to the law means that you are lifted above all the judgments and condemnations of the law. The law cannot condemn you when you have died to the law.

You can only be holy if you die to the law. If you do not die to the law, then no matter how good and glorious your life looks on the outside, it is a wicked life. It is wicked, first, because it denies Christ by whom one is dead to the law. It is a wicked life also because the one who lives that life hates the law and the God of the law.

Since no man can keep the law and live, one who is not dead to the law must necessarily change the law's demand for perfection to mean instead that he must try his hardest to keep the law. And he must inevitably redefine the righteousness and goodness of God—whereby God blesses the righteous and curses the wicked—to mean that by grace God rewards imperfect good works.

Only when you die to the law are you alive to God, and then you live unto God. And you must admit that a life lived unto God is the best life. It is the beginning of heaven here on earth.

When the false teacher teaches Christ and your good works as the way to God's fellowship and defends that by saying, "I am only interested in the holiness of the church," then you must say to the false teacher,

I can never be holy by your doctrine, but I must become a very wicked person who denies Christ and changes the righteousness of God into unrighteousness. Your doctrine will bring me into bondage, and your doctrine will kill me now and forever. Christ gives me the best life possible. It is life unto God. And Christ does this because he justifies me by faith alone without my works.

In Galatians 2:20–21 the apostle is still dealing with the life unto God, the reality that the life that we have through faith in Jesus Christ is the best possible life. The apostle calls that life a Christ-life. The life that we have by Jesus Christ is the life of Christ in us. It is a Christ-life, and a Christ-life is the best life. A Christ-life is, first, a life in which you cannot be condemned. You can never be condemned for any of your sins. A Christ-life is, second, living a heavenly life while you are still living on earth. This Christ-life you have through faith in Jesus Christ. A Christ-life is the infallible and inevitable fruit of Christ's righteousness imputed by faith without works. All who seek to be acceptable to God by faith and their works are devoid of this Christ-life because they are not justified and are still in their sins.

And the apostle is still dealing with Christ's righteousness. He is dealing now with the infallible and inevitable fruit of Christ's righteousness. The fruit is a Christ-life.

To understand what the apostle is saying in the text, you must know that *righteousness is life*. Whoever is righteous lives. Second, you must know that *the quality of the righteousness explains the quality of the life*.

If you have law-righteousness, you might have life. Let us say that you could perfectly obey the law, which says, "Whoever does me lives in me." There is life in the law if you could keep it perfectly, but your life would be an earthly, carnal life. The best kind of life in the law was Adam's life in the garden of Eden. But that kind of life is all that the righteousness of the law can give. The law cannot give a higher, heavenly life.

However, you cannot perfectly keep the law. Therefore, the only life that you can have in the law is a life of death, condemnation, fear, misery, wretchedness, wondering, and a fearful looking for judgment to come. There is no life in the law for the sinner because the law says that the sinner must die. The law leaves the sinner where he is. If you come to the law as perfect, the law will leave you there. If you sin in the law, the law will leave you there. If you come to the law dead, the law will leave you there. There is no gaining of life, blessedness, or glory by the law. Not for a mere man.

The righteousness of Christ equals life. However, the life that Christ gives is on a much different plane. You live in the flesh now, and so you must live this life that Christ gives in the flesh. Yet the flesh does not explain this life. It is a Christ-life. It is a life that is above sin, death, and condemnation. It is even a life where there is no possibility of sin, condemnation, and death. A Christ-life is the life that Christ received himself—that is, the life that Christ now lives in heaven in immortality and with the impossibility of sin, condemnation, and death.

A Christ-life is obtained only through crucifixion. The only way to enter that life—the life of immortality and the impossibility of sin, condemnation, and death—is through the cross. If the sinner were to gain that life at the cross by himself, the sinner would have to satisfy the justice of God, suffer all the wrath of God, go to hell, die for his sins, and love God perfectly. Having satisfied the justice of God, the sinner would have to be raised from the dead. His obedience and suffering would have to be so perfect and glorious that they would be worthy of eternal life. As the reward for his righteousness, the sinner would receive immortality and the impossibility of sin, condemnation, and death—a Christ-life.

Impossible for man!

But a Christ-life is a reality because of the Lord from glory! His glorious person, the person of the Son of God, makes his righteousness glorious and worthy of eternal life. This Christ received from God the Father when he raised Christ from the dead and set Christ at God's right hand.

The apostle says about himself and for the believer,

I was crucified with Christ. I died, and I rose again to life—a new life of immortality and no possibility of sin, condemnation, and death. I was crucified with Christ. You understand that I must be crucified!

The apostle does not say in the text, "Christ was crucified for me." But the apostle says, "I was crucified with Christ." That is because the sinner must die. The sinner must bear his offenses. The sinner must bear the punishment for his own sins. That is God's justice. That is also the law, which says, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10).

Neither does the apostle say, "I died with Christ." But he says, "I was crucified with Christ." Crucifixion is the accursed death, the death whereby God drives as with a sword the living word of his wrath into the heart and soul of the sinner and cuts down the sinner. God brings the sinner down into hell through the cross.

"I was crucified with Christ."

Do you understand what the apostle means by "I was crucified with Christ"?

First, he means that two thousand years ago when Christ was crucified, I was crucified, and you were crucified. Literally, the text reads, "I have been crucified." The apostle refers to the reality that happened two thousand years ago on Golgotha.

Two thousand years ago the soldiers captured you in the garden.

Two thousand years ago the soldiers bound you like a thief.

Two thousand years ago Pontius Pilate tried you.

Two thousand years ago the Jews found you guilty.

Two thousand years ago the Roman soldiers dug a hole in the ground, set your cross in the hole, and nailed you to that cross between two thieves, so that you were numbered with the transgressors.

Two thousand years ago all who passed by laughed you to scorn.

Two thousand years ago you entered the darkness of God's wrath, the darkness that was God's judgment against the sinner and that signified the very darkness of hell. You entered that darkness; out of that darkness and in that darkness, God's wrath pressed out of you a terrible

cry from your breast, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Two thousand years ago the darkness was lifted.

Two thousand years ago you gave up the ghost.

Two thousand years ago you went into a grave.

Two thousand years ago you arose from the dead.

You were crucified with Christ, so that the cross of Christ was your cross. The death of Christ was your death. The crucifixion of Christ was your crucifixion. You were crucified with Christ, and the resurrection of Christ was your resurrection.

Second, the apostle means by "I was crucified with Christ" the reality of what happens to the believer in his heart every day by faith. What happened at Golgotha, where you were crucified with Christ, is brought into your heart by the Holy Spirit. He makes that the living reality of your life. You were crucified with Christ, so that truth—the accomplishment and the saving efficacy of Golgotha—is brought into your heart and life and made the ground of your entire existence.

Oh, the apostle is not making a dogmatic statement. He does not say that the elect were crucified with Christ. That is true. But the apostle makes a confession of faith: "I was crucified with Christ." He makes that confession because when the doctrine of justification by faith alone is attacked, that is an attack on the most intimate reality of one's salvation. Paul says,

I was crucified because I was a sinner who needed to be crucified. I was crucified because I had guilt on account of which I was worthy of condemnation. I was crucified because I had no right to stand and live in the presence of God. I was crucified because I was dead, and I deserved to go to hell. And this must be the ground and source of my entire existence every day, for every day I am a sinner who deserves condemnation.

In that crucifixion of me with Jesus Christ is found the very deepest reason for my life now. I was crucified. And I am crucified with Christ every day, so I am dead. My old, guilty, polluted, sinful, and damn-worthy self is dead. It has been cursed and sent into hell.

The life of Christ before his death and resurrection was a sin-life, not because he had his own sin but because he had the sins of all his people on him. Because Christ's life was a sin-life, he lived that life justly under the wrath and punishment of God. Therefore, Christ's life was no life at all. It was a death-life. When that happened to Christ, that was your life too, so that in Christ's crucifixion for all your sins, you were crucified.

And you live! Christ's resurrection is your resurrection.

That is also how you must understand “I was crucified, and I live.” It is not “I was crucified, nevertheless I live.” Neither is it “I was crucified, but I live.” That is not the point. “I was crucified, *and* I live.” The crucifixion of you with Jesus Christ is the ground of your life. That is the only ground and the only source of any life.

There is no other life. In this world there is nothing but the valley of the shadow of death, and life in this world is nothing but a continual death. In this world there is only sin and guilt. Therefore, there is only the wrath of God, the fearful looking for judgment, and the terror of death. There is no life. There is no life in this world because all men perished in Adam. All men departed from God, who was their life. All men died in Adam. All men are now conceived and born dead, and they rot until the eternal wasting of hell overtakes them. There is no life in the world. There is nothing at the end of this death-life for everyone in Adam except eternal death.

“I was crucified with Christ, and I live!”

Your crucifixion with Christ—the fact that when Christ died, you died—means that you live now. You truly live. You have a life that is a Christ-life. That is what the apostle means when he says, “Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” The apostle battles the opponents of his theology who ridicule a Christ-life and make a separation between the elect sinner and Christ when they say,

Christ died for me. Christ forgives my sins, and now Christ gives me a life that I have independently of him. *I live!*

Did not God regenerate *you*? Do *you* not live? Are *you* not made a new person? Do *you* not do good works? Do *you* not believe?

No, *you* do not do those things. Christ does them.

The opponents ridicule and mock a Christ-life. They think teaching a Christ-life makes man a stock and a block. They say, “You cannot preach a Christ-life because that will make the congregation a pack of antinomians.”

But preaching a Christ-life is preaching the gospel, and the preaching of the gospel does not make men antinomians! The apostle says,

I do not live, but Christ lives in me. Not me but Christ. My whole life is Christ. I live that life in the flesh. That is true. I do things every man does. I eat. I drink. I go to sleep. I work. But I do not do those things as other men do; the doing is Christ in me. And I do things that men by nature do not do, but only Christians do. I pray. I believe in God. I hear his word. I repent. I hate sin. And I do all of that in my flesh.

But that life cannot be explained by the flesh, for that life is Christ in me. This means that the

life of Christ in me cannot be explained by me and my person. I live life in the flesh, but it is not I who lives but Christ in me.

I am Christ, and Christ is me.

The opponents hate that statement. Oh, yes. It takes away everything from man and gives all the credit to God in Jesus Christ, his Son.

Paul says further,

You cannot join me too closely to Jesus Christ. Christ believes in me. Christ repents in me. Christ does good works in me. Christ obeys the law in me. “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”!

That life is a Christ-life, first, because that life is above condemnation. One who has a Christ-life cannot be condemned, even if he breaks the whole law his whole life long. The devil, the world, and the law cannot condemn him. The law will come to him and say,

Well, you did not do this, that, and the other thing. You cannot have fellowship with God. You were supposed to do this, that, and the other thing. You cannot have blessings from God.

You must tell the law, “You cannot condemn me, law. If you are going to condemn me, you must first condemn Christ.”

Then you become bold and say to the law,

Now, law, you said that I must do this and that and the other thing to have fellowship with God. I must do this to have God love me. I must do that to have God’s blessings. I must do something else to have closer fellowship with God. And you tell me that I did not do these things, so I cannot have fellowship with God. I did not do that, so I cannot have God’s grace. And I did not do this, so I cannot have God’s blessings. Law, you must condemn Christ.

And then you become very bold and say,

Now, law, you are the devil coming to me. I broke the whole law of God. I did not do the things that you told me to do, and I did things that you told me not to do. I am an idolator, an image worshiper, and a Sabbath breaker. I take the Lord’s name in vain. I am disobedient to my parents and superiors. I am an adulterer, a murderer, and a false swearer. Besides all that, I am covetous, so that sin is in my very nature. I am flesh and can only live my life in the flesh, and my flesh is rotten and totally depraved. But, law, you cannot condemn me without first condemning Christ;

for I was crucified with Christ, and I live in him, and he lives in me.

A Christ-life is a life above condemnation, so that you never can be condemned again. For one who has a Christ-life to be condemned, Christ must be condemned.

The law cannot say, "You must keep me to live." Can the law tell Christ what to do? Can the law come into heaven and say, "Christ, you must do this, that, and the other thing in order to live"? The law cannot do that. Christ is Lord of the law. He is the lawgiver. He is the judge. The law does not control Christ; he controls the law.

This is true for the believer. This is what it means to be free. A Christ-life is a life of liberty, a life of freedom, freedom from the condemnation of the law. Thus the law cannot deprive you of your life because you do not keep the law. The believer's life is hidden with Christ.

Second, a Christ-life is the beginning of eternal life in you now. Christ in you—that is heaven. Christ's doing in you every good thing; Christ's living in you and through you, so that all that you do is to the glory of God—that is heaven. Oh, yes, it is a principle, but it is a victorious and an indestructible principle.

What does Christ do? Christ is wholly devoted to the glory, honor, and holiness of God. With a single mind Christ is always seeking the glory of God.

You have that life in Christ himself. You might never, ever, seek God's glory. Let us just say for the sake of argument that you do seek God's glory, but when you seek God's glory, you do it half-heartedly while also seeking your own glory. In Christ you obey the whole law. In Christ you love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. In Christ you love your neighbor as yourself. In Christ your life is perfect.

Third, a Christ-life means that in Christ you have that life in principle. You begin to live that life now. It is impossible that you not begin to live that life. Christ is in you. You cannot resist Christ. You cannot fight Christ. Christ so works in you that you will to live a Christ-life.

A Christ-life can be characterized as a resurrection-life. It is a life of one who is worthy of death, who was crucified, arose from the dead, and ascended to glory above the possibility of sin, condemnation, and death. When that life comes into you, Christ comes into you, and Christ is righteousness, peace, joy, comfort, and holiness. And he drives away sin, guilt, darkness, and sadness. You live, yet not you but Christ in you.

Is there a better life than that?

Can you live a better life by law keeping? Can you give something to God that is more precious to him than the life of Christ?

Oh, God forbid!

What is a law-life? A law-life is that you must keep the law to go to heaven. You must do this and that to be a holy person and to be acceptable to God. Do not forget that that life is a law-life.

"Oh, yes," the opponents say, "Christ is the basis of your righteousness, but if you want to be holy and acceptable to God, then you must believe. You must obey. You must repent."

There is nothing but bondage, misery, condemnation, and death in that law-life. You can never obey enough, repent enough, believe enough, and do enough. If you start making rules for yourself about what you must do to be a holy person, you will never stop, and you will add precept upon precept and law upon law until you are buried. There is nothing but bondage in a law-life.

A Christ-life is freedom and liberty. You died already for all the sins that you have committed, are committing now, and ever will commit. And you arose from the dead, and you never can be condemned. And you begin to live unto God. That is a Christ-life.

You have that life only by being justified by faith alone. You do not have that life by being justified by faith and works. You do not have that life by your works. You have that life because of the power and efficacy of the death of Christ. You have that life on the ground of the righteousness of Christ alone. And you have that life because you are one with Christ.

You must ask yourself,

How could I die with Christ, so that I was crucified? I was not even born when Christ was crucified. Now I live in the flesh, and in this flesh I commit all kinds of sins. How can I live?

The apostle says,

You live by "the faith of the Son of God." You have a Christ-life by faith alone. You have a Christ-life by faith alone without works. You have a Christ-life by faith alone without obedience to the law. You have a Christ-life by faith without repentance. The life that you live, you live by the faith of the Son of God.

When the apostle says "faith of the Son of God," he does not refer to Christ's faith, but he refers, first, to the object of your faith, which is Christ. It is faith that cleaves to Christ. It is faith by which you are one with Christ. It is faith by which you ascend in Christ to the presence of God.

Second, the apostle refers to the contrast between faith and obedience (works). That is always the contrast in this matter of your living: faith or obedience. Faith is one thing; obedience is another thing. Faith is one thing; work is

another thing. Faith is one thing; doing is another thing. When the apostle says “faith of the Son of God,” he contrasts that with all that you can do—all your obedience, all your repentance, all your activities, all your works. These things are not faith. You do not have union with Jesus Christ by works. This means that you do not become a good person by your works. You do not become acceptable to God by your works. You are not put in possession of the saving efficacy of the death of Jesus Christ by your works.

This Christ-life is yours by faith.

It is by faith alone.

What the apostle says can be put in terms that men use today. You do not have fellowship with God both by Christ and in the way of your obedience. You do not have blessings from God and closer fellowship with God both by Christ and in the way of your obedience.

It is by faith.

It is by faith alone.

This is because by faith you are one with Christ. Your obedience cannot make you one with Christ. You could obey the law perfectly, but you would not become one with Christ by your obedience. All your good works and activities cannot join you with Christ. Therefore, you cannot possess Christ’s righteousness by these things, and not having his righteousness you cannot live. But you must die by these things. By faith alone you are one with Jesus Christ. By faith alone the saving efficacy of the death of Christ comes into your heart, so that you are crucified with Christ. Your sinful self died, and you arose from the dead, so that you are free from condemnation.

Do not miss what the apostle means when he says “faith.” He means *your union with Jesus Christ*. Because you are one with Christ—engrafted into him by faith—you are a member of Christ’s corporation and a partaker of his righteousness and life.

Yet the apostle speaks of a oneness with Christ at a deeper level. From where did that faith come? If you are one with Christ now by faith, so that you have been crucified with Christ, arose with him, and now you live the Christ-life, from where did that come? Two thousand years ago you were not even alive. You existed in the counsel of God. This is what the apostle brings up by the word “loved.”

“I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Love! That is the love of God, the love of God whereby he set his affection on you, the love of God whereby he eternally chose you to be his child, the love of God by which he gave you to Jesus Christ from all eternity. Eternally you were one with Christ, and that eternal oneness

explains that you died with him and now live with him. That eternal oneness causes you to be joined with Christ by faith and to be a partaker of his righteousness and life.

You do not have to do good works to have the love of God, fellowship with God, and the favor of God. You had God’s love, fellowship, and favor from all eternity. He loved you, and you had nothing. He loved you in Jesus Christ from eternity, and from eternity he beheld you as perfect and alive in Christ.

And Christ loved you. That is why Christ laid down his life on the cross. He loved you and gave himself for you. He loved you because God loved you. There was nothing in you that made you worthy of such love. You had nothing. Christ loved you because God loved you, and Christ loved God. Because Christ loved God and Christ loved you, Christ laid down his life for you. That is what love does. Love gives. Love gives of self.

Christ laid down his life for you.

For you?

Who are you? A good person? An obedient person? A loving person? A doing person? An active person? A repentant person?

You are a dead person who has nothing and is worthy of nothing except condemnation and damnation. Christ loved you, and loving you he gave himself for you.

The eternal love of God is your eternal connection with Christ. God took you in love and gave you to Jesus Christ. In love God took you and united you with Jesus Christ when you were yet unborn. Because you were one with Jesus Christ eternally—because eternally Christ was your head and you were part of Christ’s body, because eternally you belonged to Christ, because eternally he was responsible for you and all your sins and disobedience—he laid down his life for you. He gave himself for you, so that being united to Christ by faith, all the love, the saving efficacy of Christ’s death, all his righteousness and holiness and satisfaction, and all that Christ is in the eyes of God becomes yours.

And you live!

You live!

You can never die!

You live and are free from condemnation!

You live now unto God, having died to the law!

There is no better life than that. You cannot have life through the law. You have a Christ-life only through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Those who are righteous by faith shall live!

That doctrine—that doctrine alone—establishes grace.

What is the power of the life of Christ in you?

What is the power of God’s choice of you?

What is the power of the cross?
What is the power of the cross in your heart?
What alone saves the elect?
Grace!

Grace that administers the righteousness of Christ to you by faith without works also gives to you the life of Christ in you.

If you must keep the law of God to be righteous with God and to have fellowship with God, so that despite all Christ's work you are still found a sinner who must achieve God's favor and blessings, then Christ died in vain. That is the wickedness of the doctrine that teaches fellowship with God through both Christ and the works of the sinner. That doctrine teaches that Christ died in vain. His death did not do anything. Christ's death did not save you because you still must keep the law of God for salvation, fellowship, blessings, and life. If you must obey the law to have fellowship with God, then Christ died in vain. If Christ died in vain, that is a nullification, an abolishing, of the grace of God. That is making the grace of God vain.

If you say "I have God's blessing by Christ and my works," that is not faith. If you say "I receive greater blessings from God the more I obey," that is not faith. If you say "I need Christ, and I must obey the law of God to go to heaven," that is not faith. If you say "I need Christ to have the assurance of my salvation, and I need works for additional assurance," that is not faith. That is wicked unbelief.

Faith would not so nullify Jesus Christ and the grace of God in Christ. Faith would never mock the truth of Christ in you and say, "Oh, does Jesus Christ believe for you? Does Jesus Christ repent for you?" Faith would never do that. That is not faith; that is unbelief.

The apostle says that by the grace of God and through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and on the ground of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, you live. And the life that you live is Christ in you. It is a Christ-life. Even your life is not your own. Your life is Jesus Christ in you.

You do not have that by faith and good works. You have that by faith alone.

—NJL

FROM THE EDITOR

Fall is upon us. As the days get shorter and the nights get colder, you have in your hands another issue of *Sword and Shield*, so that you can settle into your favorite chair on a cold night for a good read. Perhaps light a little fire in the hearth to add to the ambiance.

The Reformed Protestant Churches' family conference was held this year in August at the beautiful Gull Lake in Hickory Corners, Michigan. The subject of the conference was the all-important topic of the elect sinner's union with Jesus Christ. Our salvation consists in that union with Christ. The conference speeches explored the fact and implications of that union. These speeches are in some form represented in this issue of *Sword and Shield* in the editorial and in the rubrics *Understanding the Times* and *Our Doctrine*.

Reverend Pascual continues to send informative and doctrinally sound articles from the Philippines. This month he writes about the doctrine of infant baptism as found in the Reformed creeds and other confessions. The rubric *Running Footmen*, staffed by a dedicated team of laymen and laywomen, contains an article this month by Mr. Joel Langerak Jr. titled "A Footman's Polemic."

We trust that you will find all the articles both edifying for your faith and uplifting for your spirit.

Remember that we are always looking for submissions from our readers to slip into the magazine from time to time to add variety and to give the perspectives and insights of our readers. *Sword and Shield* is a believer's paper!

—NJL

UNION WITH CHRIST: IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Reality of Union with Jesus Christ

In history there have been only two men who truly mattered, and your relationships to those two men are the only relationships that truly matter to you.

The first man was Adam. Adam mattered because in the providence of God and for the revelation of his glory in Christ Jesus, Adam fell into sin, condemnation, and death. Adam did not stand in the garden of Eden as a private person, but Adam was a federal head who represented the entire human race. Because of that legal connection with Adam, when Adam sinned, the whole human race sinned, is guilty in Adam, and in Adam is worthy of eternal condemnation. To put that bluntly, Adam sinned for you, so that Adam's sin in the garden is your sin, and Adam's guilt in the garden is your guilt. A man does not need to sin personally to go to hell, although by his own sin man daily increases his debt. Furthermore, there is an organic connection of the human race in Adam. All humans are born of one blood, and that blood is Adam's. As a result of man's guilt in Adam, Adam's corruption is passed down upon the human race from parent to child like a hereditary disease is passed from parent to child. Thus the whole human race fell in Adam and in Adam became totally depraved. Adam mattered.

The second man who mattered was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the purpose for which Adam existed. Adam served Christ and the revelation of God's grace in Christ Jesus. Adam was not a separate plan of God apart from Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was not God's repair work of a plan that failed because of Adam's disobedience. Adam fell quickly in order that God might reveal his grace and his one great plan of redemption in Jesus Christ. In Adam all whom he represented became guilty and died. In Christ all whom he represented are declared righteous and shall be made alive. Christ mattered.

The essence of our salvation as totally depraved sinners in Adam is to be cut out of Adam and to be joined with Jesus Christ. United to Jesus Christ, we have communion with the triune God, our Father, and from him we receive our salvation and eternal life.

The necessity of union with Jesus Christ is because

all salvation is stored in Jesus Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Jesus Christ was incarnated as the head of his elect people. They were chosen in him, and they are the fullness of him who fills all in all. They stood in the eternal decree of God as a single entity or corporation, and thus Christ came representing his people as the one who is responsible for them and for their sins. By his incarnation, lifelong obedience, and atoning suffering, Christ accomplished salvation for his elect people, so that their salvation is a reality in him.

It must always stand on the forefront of our minds that Jesus Christ accomplished all salvation and that this salvation is present in Christ and is inseparable from his person. He is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

It is entirely proper to say that justification and all the benefits of salvation preceded our union with Jesus Christ. They preceded that union as eternal realities in the counsel of God, where the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world as the head of his elect people. In the counsel of God, Christ and his elect people were a corporation, so that the elect were in Christ in election. In election they were also partakers of his saving work and all its benefits.

The benefits of salvation preceded union with Jesus Christ in the reality of the cross. Christ accomplished the whole will and counsel of God for our salvation. The presentation of scripture is always what God has done and what is a reality in Jesus Christ. The gospel is the worldwide proclamation of what is already true in Jesus Christ. We have been reconciled to God, and God does not impute our trespasses unto us. Christ was delivered on account of our offenses and was raised from the dead because he had accomplished our justification. Reconciliation, justification, forgiveness, and sanctification are not effected by faith, but they are realities that are completely secure in Christ and which he distributes at his pleasure. The benefits of salvation exist wholly and entirely in Christ and that before we were born or heard a syllable of the gospel. Who Christ is and what he has done according to God's counsel and will are announced through the gospel in the world, and the elect are brought to believe it.

There is, then, no participation in or enjoyment of salvation in Christ apart from communion with his person. The benefits of the covenant of grace and thus of salvation are not like material gifts that can be distributed and then owned and enjoyed apart from the giver of those gifts. This is a very common error that views salvation as a series of gifts that God progressively bestows on his people, who then enjoy those gifts independently of the giver. Thus God's people exist apart from Christ as saved sinners, as entities that Christ has created outside himself. The gifts of salvation and the benefits of the covenant of grace never exist independently of Christ's person. In order to participate in the salvation of Christ, the elect must be united to Jesus Christ. There is no salvation except in communion with Jesus Christ. No one who perished in Adam is saved unless he is engrafted into and made one with Jesus Christ.

This communion is properly called the covenant of grace, which is the relationship of fellowship and friendship between the triune God and his elect people in Jesus Christ. The covenant of grace is the sphere in which fellowship with the triune God is a reality. The covenant of grace is not first an activity of fellowshiping, but the covenant of grace is first the sphere, the place, of God's fellowship. That sphere where God's fellowship is found is exclusively Jesus Christ. When the elect are joined with Christ, they enter and enjoy fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, who make themselves known to us. Each person of the Trinity promises to the elect their salvation, and the elect are assured that this is true. So the essence of the concept that we call the covenant of grace is also then union with Christ.

Heinrich Heppé gave the Reformed consensus regarding communion with Christ in the covenant when he wrote that

the merit which Christ acquired for himself by his humiliation and obedience is made effective for the elect and for them alone by their appropriation of the benefits and promises of the covenant of grace, namely Christ and his benefits, and by God's institution in them thereby of real communion in the covenant of Christ.¹

God institutes in his people a real communion in the covenant of Christ. Christ really is synonymous with the covenant. God gave Christ as a covenant for his people. And to be included in Christ is to be included in the covenant of grace. To be excluded from Christ is to be excluded from the covenant of grace. We are included in Christ by election, and election demands and causes our organic union with Christ.

When we speak about union with Christ, we refer to the application of salvation to the elect children of God. There is a distinction that is often made between Christ's accomplishment of salvation at the cross and the application of salvation to the elect by faith. But we do not need to speak about the application of salvation; we can speak simply of the salvation of God's children. Salvation from beginning to end in time and eternity is wholly the work of the grace of God. The possession of salvation or the application of salvation to the elect children of God *is* their salvation. Salvation is of God. Salvation in its application is of God and excludes his elect children's working and willing as much as their working and willing are excluded from their salvation in election and their salvation at the cross. Whatever working and willing God's children perform are fruits—the infallible and inevitable fruits—of God's act to save them.

The proof that the application or possession of salvation *is* salvation is that God gives to elect children of believers the full and complete possession of their salvation in Christ. Elect children are conceived and born in sin and are subject to all miseries, even to condemnation itself. By nature they are children of wrath who are born into the darkness of the world fallen in sin in Adam and lying under the curse, and that without a single deed on their part. As those children fell in Adam, so are they again received unto grace in Christ. They fell in Adam without a single act on their part, and they are received into grace in Christ without a single work on their part. At their children's baptisms, godly parents confess that they believe that their elect children are sanctified in Christ. That phrase from the baptism form essentially means that elect infants are united with Christ, and they share in Christ's righteousness and are partakers of all his riches and gifts.

Therefore, when we speak of the *application* of salvation to the elect, we do not refer to salvation in a different sense than when we speak of salvation in the eternal decree and salvation at the cross. Salvation is of the Lord.

All of salvation is of the Lord.

Always salvation is of the Lord.

Salvation is only of the Lord.

That salvation consists in the union of the elect with Jesus Christ.

The beginning of this union is not the moment in time when the elect are united with Jesus Christ. The origin and source of their union with Christ in time is their union with Christ in eternity. This cannot be characterized simply as a legal union. Christ and his people were a very real corporation, with Christ the head and each member in his place, in the counsel of God. The

¹ Heinrich Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (1950; repr., London: Wakeman Great Reprints, n.d.), 510.

whole corporation of Christ and his people was before God from all eternity. Because of that union, the elect were dead with Christ at the cross, buried with Christ in his burial, and raised with Christ in his resurrection. As the cause and root, the elect's union with Christ in eternity is effectual and bears fruit in their union with Christ in time when they are joined organically with Christ and thus receive all his benefits.

It is particularly this organic union—the gathering of the church and the realization of the corporation of Christ and his elect in time and into everlasting life—that is our present concern.

Heppe also gave the Reformed consensus on what this union with Christ is:

According to its real nature the calling of the elect is thus a grafting into Christ or union with Christ, a real, wholesome, spiritual, and indissoluble union of the person of the elect with the divine-human person of the Redeemer...The implanting of the elect into Christ is thus the beginning of all appropriation of salvation, of all fellowship in salvation and in glory.²

Heppe quoted the theologian Herman Witsius to explain that union with Christ is the basis of all appropriation or application of salvation to the elect:

It should be noted that not only has Christ in accordance with the eternal counsel of the Father promised all these things on behalf of the elect and fulfilled them in accordance with the promise, but also, before Christ's righteousness is fulfilled to the elect for justification of life, they are so closely united to him by faith that they are one body, 1 Cor. 12:13, and, what is still more indivisible, one spirit with him, 1 Cor. 6:17; and not merely united to him but one with him, and that in such a unity, that in it in a sense there is a certain shadowing forth of that most single unity, in which the divine persons are a single entity among themselves.³

In summary, the essence of the salvation of the elect is that they are engrafted into Jesus Christ, are made members of his body and corporation, and thus are partakers of Christ and all his riches and gifts. This union is the basis of the entire reception of salvation by the elect.

Union with Christ is Faith

When we begin to define the union of the elect with Christ more sharply, then we are led to say that the essence of this union is faith. Faith is the bond through

which the elect are united to Christ. Faith is union with Christ. Let me make that sharp and clear. It is not that faith is the fruit of union with Christ. Faith *is* the union with Christ.

This is being denied today. It is being denied in the interest of an Arminian conception of faith—faith as man's act, not God's act. But faith at rock bottom is union and communion with Jesus Christ. That that is being denied in the Protestant Reformed Churches is inexcusable, and it is refusal to hear the instruction of the denomination's theological father, Herman Hoeksema. He was crystal clear when he wrote the following regarding faith:

Faith is really the bond whereby God's people are united with Christ, the means whereby God ingrafts them into Christ and makes them one plant with him, so that they stand in living communion with him. All the benefits of salvation have not only been merited by Christ, but also are literally in him. He is their wisdom, righteousness, and complete redemption. From him and out of him they receive grace for grace.

We must maintain that faith is God's own work, the work of his free grace within his people, the spiritual means of God, the spiritual power (*habitus*), whereby God ingrafts them into Christ through the Holy Spirit, and whereby he causes all the blessings of salvation to flow out of Christ to them. It is the bond to Christ whereby their souls cleave unto him, live out of him, and receive and appropriate all his benefits.⁴

Herman Hoeksema taught that because the Reformed creeds teach that. Thus it is inexcusable for a Reformed theologian to deny that faith is union with Jesus Christ. The creeds are crystal clear on these two facts: first, salvation consists in union with Jesus Christ; second, union with Jesus Christ is faith.

The elect become partakers of Christ only by faith, and faith at its essence is union with Christ.

That this fact—that union with Christ is the bond of faith—has not always been so clearly communicated in Reformed theology and in some cases has been denied outright is inexcusable in light of the teaching of the Reformed creeds. This view of the essence of salvation as union and communion with Jesus Christ and the definition of this union as the bond of faith is creedal.

First, I must prove from the Reformed creeds that the essence of salvation consists in union with Christ.

The Form for the Administration of Baptism teaches that “as they [our children] are without their knowledge

2 Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 511.

3 Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 511–12.

4 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 2:70, 72.

partakers of the condemnation in Adam, so are they again received into grace in Christ.” Our children were in Adam and partakers of his condemnation without their works. Our elect children are in Christ and partakers of his grace without their works. And the parents at baptism confess about their children that they “are subject to all miseries, yea to condemnation itself, yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as members of his church, ought to be baptized” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 259, 260). The elect children are sanctified in Christ. They are members of Christ, or are one with Christ, and they receive all that belongs to Christ.

The Form for the Administration of the Lord’s Supper says that Christ by his death

hath taken away the cause of our eternal death and misery, namely, sin, and obtained for us the quickening Spirit, that we by the same (who dwelleth in Christ as in the head, and in us as His members) might have true communion with Him, and be made partakers of all His blessings, of life eternal, righteousness, and glory. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 271)

Salvation consists in union with Jesus Christ.

The Heidelberg Catechism in question and answer 70 of Lord’s Day 26 similarly speaks about baptism and the meaning of being washed by the blood and Spirit of Christ: “It is...to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 109). And the Heidelberg Catechism in question and answer 76 of Lord’s Day 28 explains our eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s supper to mean that we

become more and more united to His sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone*; and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 113)

Zacharias Ursinus, commenting on the Christian’s only comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ, wrote,

The substance of [our only] comfort consists in this, that we are ingrafted unto Christ by faith, that through him we are reconciled to, and beloved of God, that thus he may care for and save us eternally.⁵

Fred Klooster wrote the following regarding the importance in the Catechism of the teaching of union with Christ:

An examination of these—that is the passages in the Catechism that teach union with Christ—shows that the teaching of union with Christ is very important within the catechism; it may well be the key to the catechism’s soteriology.⁶

Union with Christ is the key to the Catechism’s soteriology and its explanation of the Christian’s comfort of belonging to Jesus Christ. We not only belong to Christ as his possessions, but we also belong to Christ as members of his body—as those who are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone—who through that union are partakers of Christ and all his riches and gifts. Apart from that union, there is no salvation.

Second, I must prove from the Reformed creeds that the essence of the spiritual union of the elect sinner with Christ is faith—faith understood as a bond. Although the Reformed fathers, one and all, recognized that union with Christ is the essence of salvation, they did not agree always that faith is that bond. This is incredible in light of the clear teaching of the Reformed creeds.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 7 teaches that faith is the bond with Christ.

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. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90)

A literal rendering of the German of answer 20 would read, “No, only those who through true faith are grafted into him and accept all his blessings.” The question and answer clearly identify salvation with union with Christ. And they identify that union with faith. Faith is the instrument of our union with Christ. Faith is that union. The meaning cannot be that we have union, and then we have faith as the fruit of that union. We have union, and the *identity* of that union is faith.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 20 teaches the same thing:

Q. 53. What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost?

A. First, that He is true and co-eternal God with the Father and the Son; secondly, that He is also given me, to make me, by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me forever. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 103)

Here again is taught that faith is the instrument whereby the elect child of God is a partaker of Christ and

5 Quoted in Fred H. Klooster, *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive, 2001), 1:199.

6 Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, 1:201.

all his benefits. Faith is the instrument of the elect's union with Christ.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 24 teaches the same truth:

Q. 64. But doth not this doctrine [justification by faith alone] make men careless and profane?

A. By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 107)

We are implanted into Christ by a true faith. Faith is our union with Jesus Christ and that by which we become one plant with him.

Article 22 of the Belgic Confession teaches the same truth that faith is the bond with Jesus Christ: "Faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 50). Faith keeps the elect in communion with Christ. The idea is that by faith the elect have that communion, so that they have an abiding and indissoluble union with Christ and his benefits.

No one can be taken seriously who teaches that the Reformed creeds do not teach that faith is the definition of union with Jesus Christ. Faith is a bond, and by that bond the elect are united to Christ and kept in communion with him and all his blessings.

Union and the Holy Spirit

This union is the work of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ Jesus. By this I mean, first, that the Holy Spirit is the worker or author of the elect's union with Christ. It is the particular office and work of the Spirit to create communion and union. You might say that it is the Spirit's favorite work to create communion and union. It is the Spirit's work because that is who the Spirit is. That this union is the work of the Holy Spirit means, second, that the Holy Ghost is the personal union of the elect with Christ. They are united to Christ by one Spirit and become one Spirit with Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. As his name indicates, the Holy Spirit is the personal bond of fellowship in the Trinity between the Father and the Son. Holy, the first part of the Spirit's name, indicates that he is the personal consecration or intimate union between the Father and the Son. Spirit, the second part of his name, indicates that he is the divine breath of God. The Holy Spirit's unique, personal property is to be the intimate union between the Father and the Son. The Father breathes the Spirit to the Son, and the Son receives the Spirit of the Father and breathes the Spirit back to the Father. By the Holy Spirit the Father is in his Son, and

the Son is in his Father. This is the lively picture that the Holy Spirit gives of himself and gives of the life of God in the Trinity. In John 1:8 the Spirit lets us peer through the window of scripture into the very life of God in covenant with himself. John wrote by the inspiration of the Spirit, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." The Son is nestled in the lap of his Father. In that picture the Spirit is not left out, but he identifies himself with his favorite word: "in." The Holy Spirit is personally—as his unique personal property that distinguishes him as God from the Father and the Son—the inness of the Son with his Father and the Father with his Son.

The Spirit as God is active in all God's works. By his Spirit and Word, God created and upholds and governs the world. The Spirit in the Old Testament brought and distributed gifts to the officebearers, and without him they could not function. The Spirit sent the prophets and was the power of their words. Christ was conceived by the Spirit and did all his work in the power of the Spirit. As the reward for Christ's work of salvation, the ascended Jesus Christ received the promise of the Spirit, so that Christ is rightly said to become that life-giving and quickening Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit becomes the Spirit of Jesus Christ, then the Son pours out the Spirit, and he dwells with us. It is the Spirit who speaks in the churches, so that we hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The Spirit does not speak of himself, but he speaks of Christ and brings Christ to his people. All believers are members of Christ and partakers of his anointing Spirit and thus are prophets, priests, and kings under Christ by the power of that same Spirit. By the power of the Spirit, they receive the word of the Spirit. All who reject his word reveal that they have not the Spirit at all. By the power of the Spirit, Christ's people understand spiritual things spiritually, and they receive spontaneously the things of the Spirit. Christ's people are exalted in the Spirit above all human judgments, and they themselves judge all things. By the Spirit they are sealed against the day of redemption. They are assured of their union with Christ by the Spirit. By that Spirit Christ is in his people, and they are in Christ. It is not inaccurate at all to call the Spirit himself their bond with Jesus Christ. As the Spirit is the personal bond between the Father and the Son, so also the Spirit is the personal bond between Christ and his people. They are one Spirit with Christ. To be in the Spirit is the same as being in Christ, and being in Christ takes place in no other way than by his Spirit.

When God's people receive the Spirit, they instantaneously and spontaneously receive all the things of the Spirit. God's people become new, spiritual people formed in Christ. They walk according to the Spirit. They live and act in the Spirit. They set their minds on the things of the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, sing in the Spirit, speak in

the Spirit, rejoice in the Spirit, live under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ, and are led by the Spirit. They are assured of their adoption, of the love of God, of peace with God through Jesus Christ, and of their future perfection in glory by the Spirit. The Spirit is Christ in them. And the Spirit is ultimately God in them, for by the Spirit the Father himself takes his abode with his people. And the Spirit is thus the personal realization of God's covenant with his people. The promise of God in the covenant is simply this: "I will pour out my Spirit. By that Spirit I will give to my people a new heart, write my law on their hearts, and make them partakers of Christ, so that Christ is in them and they are in Christ and they are one Spirit with Christ." That union of the elect with Christ by his Spirit will be made perfect when corruption gives way to incorruption, when weakness gives way to power, when the natural body gives way to the spiritual body and they are made like unto the glorious body of Christ, and when the whole body of Christ will be made perfect in the Spirit, both body and soul.

That the Spirit himself is our personal bond with Jesus Christ has implications for the doctrine of faith. Many ridicule our doctrine of faith when we say that faith is Christ in us. They mock this and say, "But God does not believe for you. You believe." We may be said to believe only to

emphasize that we are rational, moral creatures upon whom the grace of God works. Faith as such is the work of God. Specifically, faith is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the author of faith. The man is a God-robber who says that faith is not God's act but man's act. In the juxtaposition of these two statements is found the pride of man. Faith is God's act. Faith is God's work. Faith is God's gift. And our activities are strictly the fruits of God's work.

Since faith is our bond with Christ, this means that faith in every aspect is the continual operation of the Spirit of Christ in us. The Spirit is the author of our faith, and he is then also the author of our union with Jesus Christ. Thus also the Spirit is personally responsible to apply Christ and all Christ's benefits to his people. The Spirit is the Spirit of our regeneration, calling, faith, justification, sanctification, and glorification, for they are all his work. In short, the Spirit is himself personally the gift of Jesus Christ to us to make us members of Christ and to make us like unto Christ himself.

We are simply the Spirit's workmanship, a new people, created in Christ Jesus by the working of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. There is nothing that we have from Christ and in Christ that we have not received by the working of the Spirit.

—NJL

OUR DOCTRINE

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

UNION WITH CHRIST: HIS MERITORIOUS WORK

A Properly Reformed Theme

The topic of the speech that I am to give is "Union with Christ: His Meritorious Work." Let me first direct your attention to the adjective in the theme: *meritorious*. If the word *meritorious* had been omitted, so that the theme was "Union with Christ: His Work," would that have changed the subject matter of this speech? Not essentially. If instead of "Union with Christ: His Meritorious Work," the theme had been "Union with Christ: His Satisfaction" or "Union with Christ: His High-Priestly Work," would that have changed the subject matter of this

speech? Not essentially. But I was given the task to speak about Christ's *meritorious* work. And I am pleased that this adjective was included in the theme.

To speak of Christ's work as meritorious is Reformed and confessional.

It is the concerted effort of certain theologians who call themselves Reformed to get rid of the word *merit* in their theology. I have in mind the theologians of the federal vision who hate and mock the term *merit*. Within their circle the idea that Christ's work for the justification of God's people was meritorious has been dismissed

as a hangover from medieval theology.¹ These theologians reject the term *merit* under a guise of extolling their god of love and mercy. But in the end, they shamelessly denigrate and seek viciously to scrub from their theology the glorious and strict justice of Jehovah God. They teach and serve a god with a little *g*—a god who is not just and therefore a god with no eyes, no ears, no hands, and no feet.

The Reformed confessions are full of the term *merit*.

Christ's merits are imputed to you and are your righteousness before God. This is made explicit in Belgic Confession article 22:

Jesus Christ, imputing to us *all His merits* and so many holy works which He has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 50, emphasis added)

If we are to understand the heart of the gospel, which is our justification by faith alone, then we must speak of Christ's merits.

Furthermore, because Christ's merits justify the elect sinner before the righteous tribunal of God, Christ with all his merits is the exclusive object of faith. That is the teaching of Belgic Confession article 22:

The Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces *Jesus Christ with all His merits*, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 49, emphasis added)

That is also the teaching of Lord's Day 7:

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*, 90–91, emphasis added)

Faith cleaves to Christ with all his merits. You cannot understand faith, and more specifically the object of faith, without understanding Christ with all his merits.

Moreover, because Christ's merits justify the elect sinner before God, the Lord Jesus Christ uses the proclamation of his merits in connection with the promise of the gospel to open and shut the kingdom of heaven. This is the teaching of Lord's Day 31:

Q. 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

A. Thus: when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, *for the sake of Christ's merits*; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 118, emphasis added)

Finally, the Reformed confessions show us that the justifying—and thus saving—power of Christ with all his merits gives nourishment, strength, and comfort to the vexed soul of an elect sinner. Article 35 of the Belgic Confession teaches this in connection with the Lord's table:

This feast is a spiritual table, at which Christ communicates Himself with all His benefits to us, and gives us there to enjoy *both Himself and the merits of His sufferings and death*, nourishing, strengthening, and comforting our poor comfortless souls by the eating of His flesh, quickening and refreshing them by the drinking of His blood. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 72, emphasis added)

The perfect sufficiency of the comfort of Christ's merits for the elect sinner stands over against the impossibility of drawing comfort from our own works and activities, which is the explicit teaching of article 24 of the Belgic Confession:

Though we do good works, we do not find our salvation upon them; for we can do no work but what is polluted by our flesh, and also punishable; and although we could perform such works, still the remembrance of one sin is sufficient to make God reject them. Thus, then, we would always be in doubt, tossed to and fro without any certainty, and our poor consciences continually vexed, *if they relied not on the merits of the suffering and death of our Savior*. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 55, emphasis added)

Vital and sufficient for the assurance and certainty of salvation is Christ with his merits. Nothing else, no work that you do, can give that certainty and assurance. Looking to anything else besides Christ with his merits causes a soul to be vexed and tossed to and fro with uncertainty.

Therefore, we see that the Reformed confessions use the term *merit*, and I am pleased that that adjective was included in the theme of the speech. It is Reformed and confessional to speak of Christ's work as meritorious.

¹ See chapter 18 in David J. Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017), 342–66.

A Theme of Heavenly Origins

Additionally, the inclusion of the word *meritorious* in the theme of the speech gives me an opportunity to purge away any misconceptions about the nature of Christ's merit. When you think of merit in connection with Christ's work, you must not think of some cold piece of business. You must think of something altogether heavenly; something that belongs to God's wonder of grace; something that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered the heart of man. Christ's meritorious work is the wisdom of God to reveal his glory by doing what is impossible for man to do. That is the idea of merit.

But that heavenly thought is widely carnalized today by the doctrine of the covenant of works. Nearly every Reformed theologian holds to, promotes, or at least permits the conception of a covenant of works. The covenant of works separates merit from God's wonder of grace. Adam could conceive of merit before God's marvelous revelation that he would do the impossible through the seed of the woman. Adam could obtain heavenly, immortal life by the performance of his duties and apart from the wonder of grace. The covenant of works teaches that Adam by the performance of the stipulations that God had given to him would receive everlasting life in heaven. A mere man could merit. A mere man could merit heavenly life by his earthly obedience. This teaching takes the heavenly thought of merit—that which belongs to what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered the heart of man—and makes it carnal. It makes merit an earthly possibility even before the revelation of the seed of the woman and God's promise of Jesus Christ.

However, I emphasize at the outset that Christ's meritorious work was the eternal wisdom of God's counsel to bring to light life and immortality in heaven by doing what is impossible for man, yea, by doing what no wise man could have ever dreamt. When Adam sunk himself and all his posterity into an unpayable debt of guilt, then God came by his promise and said, "I will do what is impossible for man. I will pay his unpayable debt." But that is not all. God not only promised to pay the unpayable debt, but God also promised, "I will bring man up out of his depths of sin not only to return him to an earthly plane of existence, but also to exalt man up into the heavenly. I will give him immortality, life beyond any possibility of sin and death and condemnation. And I will do all this as the revelation that I am the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy unto thousands and forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and I will by no means clear the guilty."

What is the idea of merit? It is God's doing what man could never do or even dream up in service of the glorification of God's name in highest wisdom.

Because of the importance of the doctrine of Christ's meritorious work, I give my definition of Christ's meritorious work. *The meritorious work of Jesus Christ is the totality of the labors of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, in his state of humiliation by which he, through the satisfaction of all punishment and obedience demanded by the law, received as head of God's covenant his appointed and proper end, namely, immortal life in heaven to the praise of God's grace and justice.*

Labors in the State of Humiliation

Consider first that Christ's meritorious work is the totality of his labors in the state of humiliation. The state of humiliation was Christ's legal position under the law of God, wherein Christ stood guilty inasmuch as he bore the sins of God's people as their head. The state of humiliation began at Christ's conception, and in that state of humiliation he went down.

In dogmatics we normally speak of five degrees of Christ's state of humiliation, degrees that are concerned with the increasing intensity of his humiliation rather than with the chronology of his life. These five degrees correspond to our apostolic confession. Christ "was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 9). Those five degrees—his incarnation and virgin birth, his lifelong suffering, his crucifixion, his death and burial, and his descension into hell—all belong to his state of humiliation. But what you can say about that state of humiliation is simply this: in his state of humiliation, Jesus Christ went down.

In Christ's state of humiliation, God imputed to Christ as the head of his elect people all their sins. By that imputation God constituted Christ the most loathsome and disgusting thing in all the universe. Then God judged Christ guilty, and God sunk Christ down and away from God's presence. From the moment Christ was conceived, he went down, down under the reproaches of God, down under God's curse, down into the depths of all depths, down into the very pit of hell. That was the state of humiliation for Jesus Christ, whose condition, you must remember, was perfectly holy and righteous. To this condition the angel Gabriel bore witness, calling that babe to be born of the virgin Mary a holy child. According to this condition, the Lord could charge all his adversaries: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:45). To that holy one God imputed sin, and Christ went down. That was his whole earthly life.

And the meritorious work of Jesus Christ is the totality of his labors in the state of humiliation. There was no time-out during the thirty-three years of his earthly ministry. There was no breather. There was no break under God's wrath. There was no moment for a sigh of relief because God had relinquished that curse. No, not until Christ had drunk the bitter dregs of God's cup of wrath

and endured every torment and anguish of the depths of hell did that labor cease. This is what we confess in the Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper:

We are confidently persuaded in our hearts that our Lord Jesus Christ...bore for us the wrath of God (under which we should have perished everlastingly) from the beginning of His incarnation to the end of His life upon earth. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 270)

This is also taught in Lord's Day 15:

Q. 37. What dost thou understand by the words, "He suffered"?

A. That He, all the time that He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 98)

The totality of Christ's life is in view when we speak of his meritorious work.

In that state of humiliation, Jesus Christ labored. Oh, he labored. He labored in the preaching and instruction of the people. He so spent himself in that work that he would collapse in exhaustion, such as when he fell into such deep sleep in the back of a boat that not even the storm roused him. He was wearied from all the temptations and mocking and plots against his life by men. But the particular labor that I have in mind is the labor of his sin-life in the state of humiliation. His whole life was under a living word of intense, infinite weight. That living word was the word of God, which said, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). Christ labored; he sweated; he toiled under that living word. That word burdened him every moment of his whole life. You could see it all over his face, for there was no form nor comeliness that man would desire him. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. So toilsome was that burden of sin that it brought him to his knees in the garden of Gethsemane, where he peered down into the abyss of wrath that awaited him. That burden pressed out of his pores big, bloody drops of sweat that fell upon the ground where his disciples slumbered.

Christ labored.

Labored he did under the burden of that accursed tree, as he was led from the place of judgment to the place of crucifixion. Labored he did on the cross, stripped of all his clothes, like a working man in the field. And labored he did under the billowing, thick, black cloud that plunged him down into the fiery agonies of hell, where he drank every drop of God's cup of wrath against the guilt of the sins that he bore.

Christ labored.

Or in the word of the conference theme text, Galatians 2:20, Christ was "crucified." You could summarize the

totality of the labors of Jesus Christ in the state of humiliation simply as that: he was crucified. The moment he was conceived, the cross cast a gigantic shadow into the life of Jesus Christ, so that he labored all his life under the shadow of the cross. Think about that this way: in every experience of the Lord Jesus Christ—whatever he endured on the earth, whatever he went through—he heard this speech from God: "You have no place on earth. You have no place in heaven. The only place you can go is to hell." And Christ's state of humiliation culminated in the cross. He went to hell. He endured its torments and agonies.

Through Satisfaction of God's Justice

And the totality of all Christ's labors was meritorious.

It is very important to understand how it is that the totality of all Christ's labors was meritorious, for neither crucifixions, sufferings, deaths, obedience, nor toil are in themselves meritorious. But Christ's were. And the totality of Christ's labors was meritorious because he satisfied God's justice.

Christ's satisfaction had two aspects to it. First, Christ exhausted God's wrath against every sin that he bore—every sin of his people that they did commit, are committing, and will commit. Second, he suffered while rendering to God the obedience that God is due according to the law. God's law requires that man love him. Man must love God with the totality of the human nature that God has given to man. Man must use every quality, every ability, that the human nature has in service of God's name. Man must glorify God. And Christ rendered such obedience. He rendered such obedience his whole life while suffering the intense and infinite agonies of God's wrath. Christ rendered such obedience even while fixed by nails to the accursed tree and plunged into the torments of hell. Christ satisfied all punishment and obedience demanded by the law. He merited because he paid in full an infinitely weighty debt and satisfied God's justice.

And I emphasize that Christ's meritorious work is an entirely heavenly thought. Christ's meritorious work belongs to God's wonder of grace that he determined from before the foundation of the world to extol his marvelous wisdom.

Christ's meritorious work is a heavenly thought because from man's perspective as the corrupt sinner who fell in the garden, man has no way out. Man in Adam has an unpayable debt to God. Man in Adam has an unpayable debt to God because God is just. God is the Lord who will by no means clear the guilty. God cannot deny himself. God is just only if he blesses the righteous and punishes the unrighteous. Even the lightest infraction against the most high majesty of God, even the smallest inclination that is not wholly wrapped up in holy zeal for God's glory, is a most wicked snarl and hatred of God's infinite holiness. As we know so well by the instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 4,

His justice requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 87)

Since the sinner with his unpayable debt cannot escape God's justice and by no means can sustain the burden of God's wrath while simultaneously satisfying the law's demand for perfect obedience out of a perfect nature, there is no way out for the sinner. But God came and said to his people, "Not only will I deliver you from your unpayable debt, but also I will give to you life and immortality. I will wash you of all your sins and bring you to heaven."

The meritorious work of Christ is a heavenly thought too because as far as man is concerned, who can know if God would have his justice satisfied? That is no mean point. To speak foolishly, if God had not willed that his justice be satisfied, then the labors of Jesus would have been in vain. But this is the heavenly thought: God wills to have his justice satisfied. He calls his Son *Christ*. That God calls his Son *Christ* means that Jesus is God's eternally appointed and God's authorized man to accomplish a meritorious work. That is a heavenly thought.

Christ satisfied all punishment and obedience demanded by the law. He merited because he paid that infinitely weighty debt in full. By that he extolled the truth that God is just.

What is peculiarly devilish about the teachers of the federal vision in their shameless attempts to jettison the term *merit* from their covenant theology is that at bottom they deny that God is just. They cloak their objection to merit by saying that a meritorious work of Jesus Christ is contrary to the relationship of love between the Father and the Son and that the idea of merit turns Christ's labors into fulfilling the terms of a contract or earning wages. But federal vision theologians do not understand Christ's meritorious work. What these theologians willfully overlook is that it was exactly in love for God that Jesus Christ rendered such satisfaction and obedience.

Do you want to see love? Look at the cross. Look at Christ's love for God's justice. As that justice rightly pummeled Christ down, down, down, Christ said, "It is good. It is comely. It is right that I suffer because God is a God of justice who by no means acquits the guilty, and I love that God of justice." And Christ rendered to God all that the law requires.

Receiving His Heavenly End

The meritorious work of Christ is the totality of the labors of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, in his state of humiliation by which he, through the satisfaction of punishment and obedience, received his appointed and proper end.

The Lord Jesus Christ justly received his proper end. What is the proper end of Jesus Christ? It is not the earth. It is heaven. It is heaven because he is the Lord from glory. It is heaven because the person of Jesus Christ is God of God and light of light. He is the eternal and natural Son of God, eternally begotten and not made. And when that Lord from glory came down from heaven to satisfy God's justice, then there was only one end for him. Having assumed a real human nature and gone down, down, down, Christ must go up in that same human nature. His person is heavenly, and so having united himself to that human nature, he makes that human nature heavenly.

That is what was shown on the Mount of Transfiguration. For a moment the earthly veil of Christ's flesh was pulled back, and his heavenly glory shown through. That is the testimony of the resurrection. When Christ arose, he arose not to an earthly life. His life was otherworldly.

That Jesus Christ is the Lord from glory is central to God's wonder of grace. God appointed Jesus Christ for this end. Why did Christ's suffering pay an unpayable debt? Why did his obedience establish everlasting righteousness? When he brought his sin-life to a close, why was heaven his only proper end? Because he is the Lord from glory. The eternal wisdom of God's counsel was always to bring man far above the earthly into the heavenly through the sending of the Lord of glory into the earth. God's eternal purpose when he created man after the image of the earthly was to fashion man after the image of the heavenly.

To this truth those who teach a covenant of works can never do justice. They say that Adam could have merited immortality in heaven. And though they will distinguish between the merit that Adam could have had and the merit that Christ had,² they still fail to do justice to the truth because they do not explain that heavenly, immortal life strictly in terms of the person of Jesus Christ. Had Adam obeyed God's law, all that his earthly righteousness could have done was to keep an earthly life. Adam never could have obtained the heavenly. That no mere man can do. Besides, such hypothetical scenarios concerning Adam's obedience are vain because God is one and God's purpose is always one. "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in

2 Recognizing that Adam's obedience and righteousness were earthly, those who teach a covenant of works must say that Adam's merit would have been *ex pacto*, so that the reward of eternal life far exceeded his earthly obedience. But Christ's merit was *ex condigno*, so that the reward he received was strictly according to the worth of his satisfaction of punishment and obedience to God. Such distinctions arise from silly and vain imaginations that run amok trying to maintain a faulty conception of God's covenant.

Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive... The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven." (1 Cor. 15:21–22, 47).

The truth is that only the work of one could be meritorious—that is, the totality of the labors of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. He paid the unfathomable debt of punishment and obedience under the law. And having brought his sin-life as the sin-bearer to an end, he received his proper end. He went up to immortal life in heaven.

Union with Christ's Merits

Now we apply that truth of Christ's meritorious work to the profound mystery that is the mystical union. Galatians 2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ." When the apostle says "I am crucified with Christ," he does not speak figuratively. He speaks literally. And when he says "I am crucified with Christ," there are three things that we must note.

First, when the apostle says "I am crucified with Christ," he speaks as an elect member of God's covenant who was with Christ at the moment of Christ's incarnation. Christ entered the state of humiliation because I was with him. What happened to Christ happened to me. For thirty-three years my life was a rapid descent under the wrath and reproaches of God against sin, a rapid descent due to being forsaken by God. There was no breather, no time-out, during the thirty-three years of that sin-life. There was no moment for a sigh of relief because God relinquished that curse upon me for a time. I labored under the living word of God, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." I heard that speech of God, pressing me down and burdening me. I was brought to my knees in the garden of Gethsemane, where I peered down into the abyss that awaited me. I was found guilty when tried by Pontius Pilate. I was led under the burden of that accursed tree from the place of judgment to Calvary. I was stripped of all my clothes and labored under the billowing, thick, black cloud that plunged me down into the fiery agonies of hell where I drank the cup of God's wrath to its bitter dregs. I gave up the ghost. I was buried in the tomb. Two thousand years ago, I was crucified with Christ. The crucifixion of Christ was my crucifixion.

Second, that crucifixion with Christ took place because it is an eternal reality. The word that the Spirit chose in Galatians 2:20 for the word "crucified" is a delightful term. It is deep. It means that eternally in God's living counsel, the abiding reality is that I was crucified with Christ, so that what was unfolded two thousand years ago was the eternal reality of God's living decree. Always I am crucified with Christ.

But these two things are not all that must be said about that truth "I am crucified with Christ." We must note, third, that the text brings this truth into the present. The

text brings this truth to me in the present, as one who is confronted with the reality of my sins every single day. Every single day my sins prevail against me. Every single day I see how disgusting and vile and loathsome I am. I am guilty. I deserve to go to hell. And the Spirit comes as the Spirit of Jesus Christ; the Spirit comes as the one who unites me to Jesus Christ; and the Spirit abides in me to bring the saving efficacy of what literally took place two thousand years ago. I am crucified with Christ. My old, guilty, polluted, sinful, and damn-worthy sin-life is dead. I already have been cursed and sent to hell.

Now I live. I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me. The fact that when Christ died, I died means that now I live. I live the life that he lives. After I died and was buried two thousand years ago, I justly received my proper end—namely, immortal life in heaven. However, according to Galatians 2:20, I have this life now in the flesh.

But this life in the flesh cannot be understood apart from Jesus Christ. According to the profound reality of the spiritual union of the elect children of God with Jesus Christ, he cannot be separated from his people. There are things that we do in the flesh: we love God; we hate our sins; we delight in good works; we want to pray; we want to obey. But that life cannot be explained in terms of what our flesh does or in terms of our minds, souls, thoughts, and inclinations. We live that life in the flesh, but it is not we who live but Christ in us. The life that we live, the heavenly life of obedience and faith and repentance, is not us but Christ who lives in us. We cannot be joined too closely to Jesus Christ.

Since we are crucified with Christ and now we live, that life is through the satisfaction of all punishment and obedience demanded by the law and is a life beyond and above any condemnation by the law. The law never can come to any of God's people and say, "You have sinned; you must die. You have sinned; you must suffer wrath. You have sinned; you must be punished." No. Christ received his life through the satisfaction of all the punishment demanded by the law. And Christ lives in us. The law cannot condemn us. Nor can the law come to any of us and say, "You must obey me to be blessed; you must obey me to have and experience God's favor." No. Christ received his life through satisfaction of the demands of the law for obedience. And Christ lives in us. That is the life that we now live, yet not we.

That life explains so many things about the experiences of the children of God. Why do the children of God suffer the reproaches of the world? Why are the children of God mocked and ridiculed and persecuted? Why are the children of God treated as the offscouring of the earth? Why do the children of God feel that in their lives they go from fire to fire and that all men hate them? You cannot explain that in terms of the flesh. The only way to

explain that is the life of Christ in us. When men persecute us, it is not us they persecute but Jesus Christ. When men mock us, it is not us they mock but Jesus Christ.

We confess with Paul, “I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”

That is no clearer than when we die, are put into caskets, and are buried six feet under the ground. There is no life in the flesh there. That flesh corrupts. But scripture says that our bodies sleep. And scripture is not using a euphemism. Our bodies sleep because Christ, the living

Lord, is always with our bodies by his Spirit. And because Christ lives in us, he will draw our corpses out of the ground, unite them to our souls, and fashion them like unto his glorious body. Such is the power of the life that Christ lives in us.

Then at that time, we will receive the perfection of that life, that immortal life, in heaven before the face of God, and we will know even as we are known.

—LB

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

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

UNION WITH CHRIST: THE INEVITABLE FRUITS OF THANKSGIVING

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

— John 15:4–5

Introduction

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ in John 15 very beautifully contain all the subject material of my speech. In the text there is the living union of the elect child of God to Jesus Christ; and as a result of that union, there is a bringing forth of much fruit. Apart from the believer's union with Christ, the believer can do nothing. Further, if a man is not united to Christ, then he will bear no fruit and will be gathered and cast into the fire and burned. The elect sinner is grafted into the vine, Jesus Christ, from whom flows all salvation and blessedness. In him is our redemption, the forgiveness of sins, the adoption unto children, eternal and perfect righteousness, the knowledge and wisdom of God, freedom from the dominion and pollution of sin, eternal life, and joy. All the blessings of our salvation are not only merited by Christ, but they are also exclusively in him. Outside Christ there is no blessing, salvation, forgiveness, righteousness, sanctification, or eternal life but only death, destruction, and hell.

This idea of union with Christ is not foreign to the scriptures and the confessions. Lord's Day 7 calls this union an engrafting into Christ.

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. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 90)

Lord's Day 24 calls this union an implanting. Answer 70 of Lord's Day 26 says that we are “sanctified to be members of Christ.” Lord's Day 28, in explaining what it means to eat and drink Christ in the Lord's supper, teaches that it is to “become more and more united to His sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us.” Belgic Confession article 22 states, “Faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with Him in all His benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 107, 109, 113, 50). And Christ speaks of this union in John 15:5 when he says, “I am the vine,

ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.”

Jesus Christ draws a picture for us to explain this union. He says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” The figure is that of a twig or branch engrafted into a tree or vine. The engrafted branch becomes one organism with the tree to which it is engrafted and from which the branch receives all its life-sap. The branches receive all the life of the vine, and the result is that there is fruit. The grapevine lives, and the life of the vine produces clusters of grapes through the branches. Such is the illustration of Jesus Christ in John 15. He compares the relationship between himself and believers to that of the vine and the branches.

The issue is that we are not natural branches of the vine, Jesus Christ, nor can we join ourselves to Christ. In Adam, as our legal and organic head, the entire human race died when Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God judged man with death as surely as he had said in the garden. All men, including us by nature, belong to the dead tree of Adam, in which there is no life or possibility of life. An engrafting must take place. We must be taken out of the dead tree of Adam and placed into abiding communion with the living tree, Jesus Christ. As long as we are in Adam, we are dead in trespasses and sins. And we cannot, will not, and cannot will to join ourselves to Christ. Man cannot engraft himself into the true vine.

The branches need to be grafted. One cannot take a dead twig, stick it in the ground, and hope that it will show life and sprout leaves and bring forth fruit. It will not. A child playing in the yard can take a stick and put it in the dirt, but it will never become alive. The dead twig needs to be bonded to a vine that is alive and has a root system to bring in water and nutrients to the twig. Neither can the dead branch engraft itself into the living tree. The whole work of engrafting is an act of God. The sinner is entirely passive in this work. That is true in nature. A dead stick needs someone to join that branch to a living tree. The farmer must cut the branch out, trim it, prepare the site, place the branch, wrap it, and tend to it.

The wonder of grace of joining us to Christ is the gift of faith. Faith is the means or instrument whereby we are united with Christ and made one body, plant, and organism; and by faith we live out of Christ, draw everything from him, and receive all our salvation in him alone. That union with Christ is faith. Faith is an engrafting into Jesus Christ. A graft is a bond. The dead branch must be bonded and placed into abiding communion with the living tree. That union and communion is the essence of our salvation. 1 Corinthians 1:30: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Christ is become that unto us because we are *in* him.

Jesus Christ speaks about that union to himself: “He

that abideth in me, and I in him.” Jesus Christ is in the believer, and the believer is in Jesus Christ. We are bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. We are one flesh with him. He is the head, and his elect people are his body. He is in us, and we are in him by the Holy Spirit, who is the author of our faith. Faith is the Holy Spirit’s book. He is the author of that book. He conceived of that book, wrote it, and puts his stamp on that book, to which no man can add his own words.

Election stands as the source of this union. Christ speaks of that in John 15:16: “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” God appointed, chose, and ordained a people in Jesus Christ. That is election. In election God united you to the true vine. Election stands as the root, fountain, and ground of every saving benefit, including your union to the mediator, Jesus Christ. Election demands the calling of God by his living and powerful voice, which gives faith. Because of that election, God graciously bestowed the gift of faith on his people before they ever did one good deed.

By faith we appropriate all the merits, satisfaction, and righteousness of God in the flesh. By means of faith, we are imputed the righteousness of Jesus Christ apart from our works. Christ lives in us, and living in us the same brings forth much fruit. 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 the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Inevitable Fruit

Fruit is not a term that man made, dreamed, or conjured up, but the term *fruit* is theologically precise, scriptural, and confessional. *Fruit* is a word to explain the life of gratitude of the believer who is joined to Christ. The phrase *in the way of* is not a precise term. In fact it has become a loaded term to sow confusion about a simple topic in the whole scheme of Reformed doctrine. You do not need the phrase *in the way of* to explain the truth of the life of thanksgiving. Using the phrase *in the way of*, one can drive a whole truckload of false doctrine into the heart of the gospel, justification by faith alone. But the term *fruit* properly explains the role of good works and the relationship of good works to salvation and the covenant. Belgic Confession article 24 speaks of the fruit of faith and that it is impossible that this holy faith be unfruitful in man. In John 15 fruit is the inevitable, divine result of union with Christ.

This fruit is the believer’s life of good works performed in gratitude to God—namely, repentance, prayer as the chief expression of thankfulness, and obedience to God’s law. Good works are those that proceed from a true faith

and are performed according to the law of God and to God's glory. Good works and the life of gratitude are the fruits of faith or the fruits of our union with Christ. Christ's life flows through the branches, and fruit is produced.

That the believer brings forth fruit is inevitable. It is impossible that the believer does not produce fruit. This is confessional. Defending the doctrine of justification by faith alone, Lord's Day 24 asks,

Q. 64. But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

A. By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into [united to] Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 107)

And Lord's Day 32 asks,

Q. 86. Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. *Because Christ*, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, *also renews us by His Holy Spirit* after His own image; that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 120, emphasis added)

It is impossible that we do not bring forth fruit. It is inevitable and automatic that fruit springs forth out of faith.

And the fruit that each branch brings forth is according to the nature of the branch. Christ is the living vine, and the fruits produced through the branches are according to the time, place, circumstance, and person that God has eternally determined for each individual believer. The good works ordained and prepared for me will be different than the good works prepared for my wife. If a farmer grafts an avocado branch into an orange tree, the branch does not bring forth oranges, but it produces avocados. And keep in mind the massive diversity of the body of Christ. God did not make us all lookalikes in gifts and abilities, but the unity of the church of all ages consists in her remarkable, astoundingly rich diversity. No two members have the same gifts, abilities, personalities, and temperaments. As such, God has prepared fruit for each member of Christ that each should walk in that fruit.

We are filled with fruit. Philippians 1:11 states: "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." We receive these good works through the mediator, Jesus Christ. He fills us with fruits of righteousness. To be filled is passive. God fills up his people through Christ, the mediator. Christ had to earn those good works for us to do. Jesus Christ strikes the same note in John 15:5: "For without me ye can do nothing." Our good works are Jesus Christ's

good works. Without the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no fruit. It is only by the power of the Spirit and through faith that we receive all the good works that we will ever and can ever do. Christ works in us and through us, and the fruit that is produced must all be ascribed to God.

One might challenge that and say, "Are you not making man a stock and a block if you say that our good works are Jesus' good works?" The opponent continues, "If they are Jesus Christ's works, if he works them by his Spirit, if he gives them, and if you say that you are only an instrument, then that denies that you do them. *You* actually must do those good works!"

Canons 3–4.12 answers the opponent,

Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 169)

The answer is that God works in his rational, moral creatures according to their natures. If God wanted to move a block from one side of a room to the other, he would simply push it. The block's nature is such that to push it is the way for it to be moved. If God wanted to move a marionette to the other side of a room, God would use his hands to manipulate the strings of the puppet. But man's nature is such that he is a rational, moral, volitional creature. God works according to that nature as he created man. God does not push us like a block. He does not manipulate us like a string puppet. But God works by his grace out of the principle of regeneration upon the will and mind of man so that the will becomes active. We perform these good works, but only because God works on us by his grace according to who we are as rational, moral, volitional creatures.

Yet these good works are never meritorious, the way unto anything, the ground or reason for a blessing, or necessary unto salvation in any sense, whether objectively or subjectively in the hearts and lives of God's people. Works are fruits of thankfulness. Thankfulness and merit are antithetical opposites. Thanksgiving is not paying someone back. Thanksgiving is not doing something in return. What shall I render unto Jehovah for all his benefits toward me? What can you give to God that he does not give to you? God in his sovereign grace gave you salvation in your Lord Jesus Christ. God in love and strict justice sent Christ to die for his enemies. Uniting you to Christ, God justifies an ungodly sinner and makes you to live. And he gives to you even your life of good works, the inevitable fruit that he has prepared for you. You must thank him even for your life of thanksgiving.

The believer's life of gratitude and good works is his

part in the covenant. That God gives each of us a part is an awesome privilege. We do not always live in the consciousness that it is a glorious privilege to do good works. We are reminded of this part in the third doctrinal section of the Form for the Administration of Baptism, which says, “Whereas in all covenants there are contained two parts, therefore are we by God, through baptism, admonished of and obliged unto new obedience.” The baptism form explains this new obedience, “namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 258). God gives fruit not that we now take that fruit and stand alongside him as a party, but he gives each of us a part in the one party of the living God. Our parts are our lives of thanksgiving in loving God and the neighbor, living antithetically over against God’s enemies, repenting and crucifying our old natures, and walking before God as his friends in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

That fruit is the “whole of our conduct” of Lord’s Day 32, by which we show our gratitude to God for his blessings and which includes our speech, actions, and relationships to one another and relationships to others outside the church. We live before the face of God always, never able to section off a part of our lives as members of the covenant, dwelling in his tabernacle and praising, worshiping, and glorifying him now and forevermore. Christ has in mind the covenant when he says, “Ye are my friends” (John 15:14). God is our friend-sovereign, and we are his friend-servants. Good works are his gifts to us. They are determined by him, come from him, are worked by him in his grace, and are given to us to walk in them.

Function and Place of Good Works

Good works have a distinct function and place. First, good works are the purpose of our salvation. The purpose of God’s saving us is that we do good works. Consider the spiritual picture Christ draws for us in John 15. Why does the vigner plant a vineyard? Why does the farmer plant all those orange trees? Why does he tend to them? Why does he cut off the dead branches and graft those branches on living trees? The purpose is the fruit of the vine. Jesus Christ redeemed a people and consecrated a people unto himself, zealous of good works. The believer loves good works! He eagerly and excitedly delights to perform them. He does them out of burning love for God and his glory. Good works are God’s purpose in uniting you to Christ.

Second, God eternally determined to glorify himself through us as his instruments. That is all the believer is in the hand of his covenant God. God is pleased to display his handiwork before the whole world. His purpose

is that fruit is brought forth, and in that God receives all the glory. Ephesians 2:10: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto* good works” (emphasis added). God has created us unto good works, that we might walk in them. We are elected in Christ from all eternity, along with all the works that we will ever do, for the purpose of glorifying God. That is the sole purpose of good works. It is not simply a purpose or the chief purpose, but the only purpose of good works is to glorify and praise God.

Third, good works are the demonstrations of our faith. There is the provocative statement in James that we are “justified by works.”

21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?
24. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.
25. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? (James 2:21, 24–25)

This justification by works is not the verdict of the living God that we are righteous before him by faith alone in Christ. That verdict is perfect, once, and complete, and not a single good work can add to it; neither can one evil work take away from it. But “justified” in James 2 means demonstration. Your faith is demonstrated by good works and fruit. This is the same sense in which Christ speaks in John 15:10, “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” You say that you have faith. I say that I have faith. Show me your faith. I will show you my faith. True faith, union with Christ, always produces good fruit. There is no such thing as true faith that does not produce fruit. A branch that produces no fruit reveals itself as reprobate and one that must and will be cut away and cast into the fire. The reason that faith produces fruit is because faith’s object is the living Christ who reigns by his Word and Spirit. And that living Lord operates by his Spirit. Therefore, there will be fruit.

Fourth, God will judge men according to works, whether evil fruit or good fruit. Belgic Confession article 37 testifies, “Then the books (that is to say, the consciences) shall be opened, and the dead judged according to what they shall have done in this world, whether it be good or evil” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 77). There will be a great day of judgment when God will declare himself as God before the entire rational, moral world. You will not come into the judgment and bring up your fruit. God will. God will take a terrible sinner to heaven on the ground of Christ’s righteousness alone. God will demonstrate that sinner’s faith before the whole world. It will be a judgment according to works. There God will bring up those works

that are in harmony with the judge's verdict of righteousness. God will be justified. He will show himself to be perfectly righteous in his salvation of his elect and perfectly righteous in the damnation of the reprobate. In that God's name alone will be praised and glorified.

Fifth, good works are a necessary fruit. That is the force of the "must" in Lord's Day 32. Good works are necessary as a result of the redemption and deliverance of the elect sinner and his renewal in the image of God. Good works are as necessary as the light being called into existence. When God said, "Let there be light," the light was. It is inconceivable—rather, blasphemous—to suggest that the light could withstand the voice of the almighty God. So also the believer, as God determined in his grace to redeem and renew him, will bring forth good works and a life of gratitude. We must, will, can, and may do good works. The "must" of Lord's Day 32 is not about you. The "must" is about God and what he works in his grace. The "must" is a divine must, rooted in God's eternal decree of election.

When we say that good works are necessary, we do not mean that good works can merit or earn a thing. You cannot hinge some benefit of salvation on those good works. It is not in the way of your law-keeping and good works that you gain the experience of salvation, enjoyment of covenant fellowship, or deeper assurance. You cannot hinge any blessing of God on your fruit for the reason, as the prophet Isaiah states, that even your righteousnesses are as dirty, menstrual rags. The best works that the believer performs are all dirty as soon as they touch the believer's totally depraved nature, which is corrupt, wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness.

You must confess that good works cannot merit, or you are left with the idea that God rewards man's imperfect obedience. That is true of repentance too; you cannot hang the forgiveness of sins or assurance of justification on repentance for the simple reason that you do not repent perfectly. Who can say that he has repented perfectly? The repentance of the believer is sincere. Repentance springs from the perfect principle of the new life within the believer. But how often does not the believer hold back something from God and keep a little sin for himself? And into that sin again he will fall, only to be turned again to God to confess that sin in sincere, heartfelt repentance. Only the proudest Pharisee would dare to hang a thing on his repentance. Repentance can only be a fruit of faith, as it is a part of the life of gratitude given by God to the believer (LD 33).

The confession of salvation by grace alone in Christ does not set aside the law as the rule and guide of our thankful lives. Nor does that confession deny the necessity of good works and the commands of God's law. The church that holds good works in their proper place and

function upholds and establishes the law, according to Romans 3:30–31, which states:

30. Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.
31. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

The church preaches the law strictly, not as the way unto salvation or for a blessing of salvation, but that we might more and more know our sinful natures and thus become more and more earnest in seeking the remission of sins and righteousness in Christ. The believer smites himself for sin that was previously done in ignorance (Rom. 7:7). He sides with God over against himself and sin. You do not make a holy people and a holy church by preaching the law. Preaching the law never made a single person holy, and it never will. The gospel preaching of free forgiveness and perfect righteousness in the blood and merits of Christ is the only way by which God consecrates a holy people unto himself. The gospel alone is the motivation of the believer to be zealous of good works.

Sixth, good works have one singular place. They always must be kept in that proper place. The place they hold is indicated by the word *fruit*. Fruit is only ever fruit. Fruit never becomes something more than that. The fruit never becomes the graft that unites the believer to Christ. The graft is faith and union with Christ. Neither is the fruit the life of the vine. The vine draws no benefit from the fruit. The fruit does not give anything back to the vine. The vine is Christ. The wild branches grafted in are God's elect. The graft itself is faith. The fruits are good works. Fruit must always remain in the place that God determined for it. Fruit has a glorious place, but it always must remain in its proper place as fruit.

A False Charge

The Reformed Protestant Churches are charged by the Protestant Reformed Churches as being law-hating, rebellious antinomians. That is patently false. We will be perfectly clear. What we deny is that good works in any way obtain some blessing of salvation in man's experience. We confess the truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. The doctrine of justification by faith alone does not make men careless and profane. If there is a careless and profane man, the problem is not with the doctrine, but the problem is with the man. The redeemed and renewed elect believer will inevitably do good works. He will bring forth fruit.

It matters a great deal who makes the charge of antinomianism. If the charge comes from one who truly confesses the truth of justification by faith alone, then the

charge holds some weight. If the charge comes from one who believes in justification by faith and works, then that charge comes as a badge of honor that we will wear proudly.

Those who have departed from the Reformed Protestant Churches for Remnant Reformed Church must charge us as antinomians for our stance on singing in worship, in that we do not uphold the law of exclusive psalmody according to the second commandment. However, along with teaching a man-made law, Remnant teaches that this law is necessary for having fellowship with Christ: sing the psalms and obey the law of the second commandment, and Christ sings with you. Do not sing the psalms and disobey the second commandment, and Christ does not sing with you. Remnant church should come out with it and call us antinomians; and when and if Remnant does, then we will wear that badge over against those who have grown bored with the gospel, corrupted it, and conjured up a novel invention for the church to have Christ.

The union and fellowship that we enjoy in the covenant are not because of works, by means of works, or in the way of good works. Good works are the fruits of faith, by which faith alone we have covenant fellowship. By the Spirit we are united to Christ. By the Spirit and in his power, works are performed by the believer. We

have fellowship and union with the living God in Jesus Christ. And we enjoy that communion and fellowship now in our hearts and lives by the Spirit's working in the gospel. The believer has that entirely apart from the inevitable fruit that God gives and in which the believer lives. The believer has that fellowship solely by faith alone.

We conclude then with this: our heritage as a denomination is the truth of the unconditional covenant in man's experience. How does the believer experience salvation in the covenant? How does the believer experience union and communion with Christ? For the Protestant Reformed Churches and Remnant Reformed Church, one has that by obedience to the law. Good works simply have no role or function whatsoever to that end. As for the Reformed Protestant Churches, our heritage as a denomination includes the place of good works as the inevitable fruit that is the divine result of union with the mediator in the covenant of grace, Jesus Christ. The Reformed confessions, especially the Heidelberg Catechism in its experiential, subjective approach to doctrine, stand with us against all our enemies that would seek to make fruit something more than fruit. Fruit is the divine, inevitable, automatic result of union with Jesus Christ. In that God is pleased to use us as instruments to glorify himself.

—TDO

DRY MORSEL

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

THE REFORMED CREEDS AND OTHER CONFESSIONS ON INFANT BAPTISM

One and the Same Substance

The Heidelberg Catechism implies the truth of God's one covenant promise to his people when answer 74 says, "As was done in the old covenant or testament by circumcision, instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 111). Belgic Confession article 34 implies the same when it says, "What circumcision was to the Jews...baptism is for our children" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 70). The

Catechism and the Belgic Confession are not taking issue with baptizing all infants of believers and are not interested in the question whether all children of believers are truly in the covenant, that is, whether they are truly elect children whom God has given to Jesus Christ in eternity unto the consummation of his eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace. Also these creeds are not interested in the question of capability, that is, whether infants can actively profess their faith and thus have the right to the kingdom of God.

These questions I should say are Arminian in nature, and they put malice in the simplest declaration of God to his people as his people stand organically as one body consisting of both adults and children. The objective promise of God is so simple that even a child can perceive what it means that God establishes his covenant fellowship with all believers and their children. It is as simple as this: the promise is spiritual, and therefore the people to whom it is given are perceived by Jehovah God as his organic, spiritual children scattered historically throughout the world.

The key to answering scruples is consistently to insist on the spirituality of God's covenant with his people.

That in this question and answer [74] of the Heidelberg Catechism not all the children that are baptized, but only the spiritual children, that is, the elect, are meant is evident. (Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 419)

The promise of God is not carnal. Although the promise is creaturely spoken and signified, as God anthropomorphically communicated it to his people, it is not carnal and will never be a matter of material things.

The words "I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed" express the one covenant of God as having one substance, which indeed is applied in the line of continued generations of believers. This is the substance of the covenant on which all external administrations are set to be the signs and seals; for instance, circumcision in the old dispensation and, as the Catechism states, "Instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant."

Remember that the covenant has three aspects: the bond, the word, and the tokens or signs. In the words of the covenant spoken to Abraham, two implications were established. First, God always has covenant fellowship with his people. This is the end and the substance of the covenant promise. Even before the foundation of the world, God already had covenant fellowship with his people in Jesus Christ as the mediator of the covenant and as the revelation of the innermost covenant life of God within himself. Second, this covenant fellowship or bond was verbally communicated to Abraham. God declared to Abraham that the end of all things that God had determined to do was to establish a covenant with all his spiritual children. The mere fact that God spoke to Abraham in love implied an intimate relationship. God does not speak to the reprobate wicked in such an intimate manner. Christ assures his people of this intimate relationship of God with his people through Christ's mediatorial ministry. In John 15:15 Jesus said, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

God speaks to his people through Jesus Christ, and that signifies a covenant relationship that God already has with them. God spoke to them on the cross when his Son redeemed them from sin and death. Redemption pointed back to the idea of redeeming one's kinsman, as "was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming" (Ruth 4:7). Christ redeemed his kinsmen as they already had been related to his Father by virtue of his everlasting covenant of grace with them, even in eternity.

The very words of the covenant set forth the promise. In those words God has given to his people the substance of his one covenant with them—that is, first and foremost, Jesus Christ is the mediator of the covenant. The apostle Paul explained the word "seed" as pointing to the person of Jesus Christ as the fulfilment and mediator of the promise (Gal. 3:16–18). Second, I argue that "seed" also points to the fact that God has only one people. This idea appears to be repugnant to those who hold a dispensational view of the covenant. However, it is not incidental that the word "seed" is singular and that Jesus Christ has only one spiritual body, which he always represents as the mediator ordained by the triune God. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (v. 29). "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12). Moreover, by way of implication, Paul contended that baptism is done under none other than the name of Christ, who is the undivided head of the church, his body (1:13–16). Thus there is only one mediator of the covenant, and in him only one people of God is revealed in the words of the covenant spoken not just to Abraham but to the other patriarchs of the old dispensation as well.

The one and the same substance.

The third aspect of the covenant is set forth in Genesis 17:10: "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised." Circumcision and baptism serve that one substance of the covenant, and both belong to the third aspect of the same covenant, that is, the token of the covenant. External administrations of this one and the same covenant have been diverse throughout history. In the old dispensation the administrations were dispensed with other external signs, types, sacrifices, ceremonies, and prophecies. But the signification of these signs appeared more and more clearly as history progressed and when the revelation of God's covenant progressed over time as the church in the wilderness matured into the new testament church. In the new dispensation, where all truths became more naked in their manner of dispensation, most especially when the fulfilment of the law and prophets came in servant form—Jesus Christ—the church did and does perceive

the substance of the covenant as it remains under the gospel of the cross.

The signs are used to edify the people of God, but the signs have not always been the same, unlike the first aspect of the covenant—the bond. Though the signs may have been changed, nevertheless their spiritual significance remains. For instance, baptism signifies our spiritual entrance into the covenant, our children’s inclusion in the covenant, our inherited corruption and guilt, our passive reception of grace, our regeneration, the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ in us, our justification and forgiveness of sins, our part in the covenant to mortify the flesh, and most especially the blood of Jesus Christ that makes atonement for us. Those things that the signs signify remain, but the form has changed and circumcision has been abrogated according to the institution of Jesus Christ. Mind you, only God can institute, change, and abrogate the signs of the covenant. The Catechism by saying “Instead of which baptism is instituted in the new covenant” alludes to the mutable nature of the instituted signs. This is also taught in the baptism form: “Since then baptism is come in the place of circumcision, therefore infants are to be baptized” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 259). Nevertheless, as to the signs’ present institution and form, their importance must never be slighted. Hence the Catechism in answer 82 emphasizes that the covenant of God should not be profaned by an improper administration of the Lord’s supper and, by implication, by an improper administration of holy baptism. So also the Westminster Confession warns against the profaning of baptism as a great sin: “The infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized,” for it is “a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance.”¹

To profane the signs is to profane the covenant itself or the immutable and ever-operating substance. The words and the signs both are inseparable from the first aspect, the bond, as it is *the* dominant aspect of the covenant. The words and the signs creaturely serve the end, namely, the covenant of God with his people, which in essence is one with our salvation in Jesus Christ. Under the gospel both the words and the signs are inseparable from the substance of the covenant. The two can have no meaning without the bond, which they signify.

Grounds for Baptizing Infants

The Catechism in question and answer 74 gives three grounds for the necessity of baptizing the infants of believers: first, infants are included in the covenant and the church of God as much as adults; second, the covenant promise is also for infants; and third, God instituted

the signs of the covenant, like circumcision and baptism, to be applied to infants. If it is true that infants are included in the covenant and God’s church, the Second Helvetic Confession rhetorically asks,

Why, then, should not the sign of the covenant of God be given to them? Why should they not be consecrated by holy baptism, who are God’s peculiar people and are in the Church of God?²

Article 34 of the Belgic Confession says that baptizing our children should be done “upon the same promises” as given to the Jews in the old dispensation, which undoubtedly are applied to our children (*Confessions and Church Order*, 69). And the promises referred to are the different words of the covenant given to the patriarchs, which had one and the same substance—that is, I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed. By this, though not explicitly, the Belgic Confession asserts the inclusion of our children in the covenant as well as the children of Israel in the old dispensation, since the essence of the promise spoken and signified in the old dispensation does not change nor has been abrogated, though the old forms of the external signs have been changed accordingly.

Noticeably, the Belgic Confession is focused rather on grounding the baptism of our children in the application of the death of Jesus Christ, which is the blood of the new and better covenant, by explicitly saying,

Indeed Christ shed His blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful than for adult persons; and therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ hath done for them; as the Lord commanded in the law that they should be made partakers of the sacrament of Christ’s suffering and death. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 69–70)

This is a consistent application of the blood of the new covenant rather than focusing on the old testament ceremony, which was of flesh and blood. Thus baptisms of the infants of believers do not belong to the old, Jewish ceremony but to the new covenant in which Christ commanded that infants be included, for his shed blood is far greater than the cutting of the foreskin of Jewish, male babies. Christ’s shed blood covers all the spiritual children of God—adults and infants alike and male and female alike. This is to say that believing parents and their children are organically one as a household in the church and as coheirs of God’s covenant.

This is the insistence of Canons of Dordrecht 1.17: “The children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace in which they, together with

1 Westminster Confession of Faith 28.4–5, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 3:662–63.

2 Second Helvetic Confession, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:891.

the parents, are comprehended” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 159). In this light the Canons also insists on the spirituality of the covenant—that is, we do not baptize infants simply because they are children of believers, simply because they are the natural offspring of believers. Unless they repent, wayward and impenitent parents are suspended from receiving the privilege to have their children baptized. Parents who are not communicant members of a church cannot have their children baptized. This sacrament is a spiritual sign to signify spiritual realities; therefore, the parents are admonished in the baptism form that it is “not out of custom or superstition” that they present their children for baptism and that the church performs such a sacrament to them and solemnly witnesses while the children are being incorporated into the Christian church. Moreover, the Canons implies that not all infants are to be baptized. Only the children of believers are holy, not all children. Lastly, article 56 of the Church Order says, “The covenant of God shall be sealed unto the children of Christians by baptism, as soon as the administration thereof is feasible” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 397).

Children of Believers

Believers or Christians are those who publicly profess their faith in a holy congregation. The Westminster Larger Catechism teaches that the sacraments are for those “within the covenant of grace.” Baptism “is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church.” Moreover, the Larger Catechism says that “the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible Church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord’s,” which reminds us of the necessity of church membership.³

Since Christ instituted the sacraments in the instituted church, no one has the right to define the term *believers* apart from this fact when the sacraments are being explained. Thus when article 34 of the Belgic Confession says that “baptism is for our children,” this must be perceived as the confession of the church as she manifests herself in the institute. Thus “our children” can only mean that we, the members of the Christian church, have children to be baptized as Christ commanded us to do. It is foolish to think that in relation to the sacraments, the term *believers* means the elect parents, as if the church were baptizing the children of the elect per se. The church has no power to know who are the elect. If that were the case, baptism would be open to all, even to those who are members of other churches or are not members of any church at all, as long as they are elect. Rather, the church baptizes the children of those whom the church is assured are believers by virtue of their public professions—that is, those who appear before

the consistory to be received as members and those who publicly confess their faith before the congregation.

Why is that? Because the institute, the visible church, is weak and has infirmities. The Belgic Confession in article 33 humbly acknowledges this truth: “We believe that our gracious God, on account of our weakness and infirmities, hath ordained the sacraments for us” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 67). Therefore, Christ admonishes the church of this: “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). As we see the visible signs being administered in church, we are admonished that those who are citizens of God’s kingdom are known by their fruits, that is, by their verbal confessions and lives. From this principle the church asks believers the following questions at their public confessions of faith, whereby they become communicant members:

1. Do you acknowledge the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the Articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?
2. Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life?
3. Will you submit to church government, and in case you should become delinquent (which may God graciously forbid), to church discipline? (Form for Public Confession of Faith, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 266)

And at the baptism of their children, the following questions are asked the parents to assure the congregation of the parents’ confessions of faith as they present their children:

First. Whether you acknowledge that although our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself, yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as members of His Church ought to be baptized?

Secondly. Whether you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation?

Thirdly. Whether you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion (whereof you are either parent or witness), instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power? (Form for the Administration of Baptism, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 260)

The second question of the baptism form explicitly says that the parents must be members of the church where

³ Westminster Larger Catechism, A 162, 166, and 165, <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/westminster-larger-catechism/>.

their children are being baptized. “Here in this Christian church” is not an incidental phrase that was included by the fathers without great reason. Rather, the phrase was rightly included in the baptism form in light of the first question for public confession of faith—that is, the administration of the sacrament of holy baptism presupposes the parents’ memberships in the church where they present their children. This insistence on the memberships of the parents is not strange but has become part of the confession of the church, as understood from the creeds, to guard the sacraments and to prevent the profanity of God’s covenant. Thus the 1837 Synod of Utrecht firmly confessed:

All who make public confession of faith and walk in conformity therewith must with their children be acknowledged as members of the church of Christ.

Confession of faith consists in the agreement from the heart that is made public by the acknowledgment with the mouth of all the chief articles of the Christian religion.⁴

The Reformed creeds and other confessions of the church are clear regarding the reason for baptizing our

children. Preeminently, the reason is Jesus Christ—his covenant, his death and suffering, his words of institution, and his declaration that the promise is unto us and our children. Therefore Canons 1.17 admonishes believing parents thus:

Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 159)

This article refers to the children who have not yet reached the years of discretion, since the context is the death of infants of godly parents. If you are thus convinced that your children are included in the covenant and in the church of God, let them receive the sacrament of holy baptism, “not out of custom or superstition” and “as soon as the administration thereof is feasible,” because they are “partakers of the sacrament of Christ’s suffering and death.”

—JP

RUNNING FOOTMEN

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

A FOOTMAN’S POLEMIC

Footmen

Footmen are soldiers of the infantry who typically have no unique positions or authority. They are everyday, ordinary soldiers who are charged with the basic tasks in combat and warfare. Footmen go about unremarkable jobs, often unknown and unseen. Footmen are not the generals, lieutenants, or colonels. Footmen are not the commanders, strategists, or specialists. Footmen are not the champions, warriors, or heroes. Footmen are not lauded by men, save through extraordinary acts of bravery and heroism. Footmen may go through years of dedicated service, but they are quickly forgotten and are often unrecognized for their work.

In Jehovah’s elect army there are many footmen. In

God’s providence only a select few of the elect number have had their names carried down to many generations. Occasionally, God gives to the church a Moses, a David, a Paul, a Peter, an Augustine, a Gottschalk of Orbais, a Guido de Brès, or a John Calvin; but compared to the millions of members in the whole body of Christ, this is rare. God designs the lives of his people in this way to show us that lasting fame and recognition are often not the lot of his people in this life. There is something seriously wrong when a supposed Christian seeks fame and recognition in the world, perhaps through politics, entertainment, earthly success, or worse, through gaining a following in the church.

Most of God’s people are forgotten by man as the years roll on; many are relatively unknown even in their own

⁴ Marvin Kamps, 1834: *Hendrik De Cock’s Return to the True Church* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), 209.

day. They often do not make impressions on the pages of history; they are often not remembered for mighty deeds; they certainly do not capture the interest and imaginations of the world. They might not even make seemingly much of an impact upon the church of their day. They might not be seen on the frontlines doing mighty deeds for the kingdom. They are overshadowed by church leaders and those with extraordinary spiritual gifts. They might do only small, unnoticed acts: a glass of water in Christ's name over here, a brief word of godly encouragement over there.

But recognition of men and fame in this world do not matter. What matters is the truth on which God places his people and that truth in which they stand—the truth of God, his name, and his Son, Jesus Christ, with salvation through him alone. And while God's people are neglected by men, God not only remembers them but also builds them into a beautiful and exact temple. They are the apple of God's eye, and they are written forever on the back of his hand and in the Lamb's book of life. They are the objects of his love and grace only for Christ's sake and through his work—not through their own works, however great or small those works may seem. Through Christ's work God beholds his elect as lovely and pleasing to him!

God is pleased to use ordinary, lowly footmen for his divine purpose, that is, his glory. He chooses to use the simple to confound the wise. He ordains strength from the mouths of babes and sucklings. The simple! Babes and sucklings! Common, ordinary nothings in the eyes of man!

Man always has his opinions of things. These opinions are often antithetical to God's thoughts on those things. Did not the giant Goliath disdain young David because he was a ruddy, smooth-faced boy? Yet God decreed to use that boy to kill Goliath, the enemy of God's Christ and his church. Did not man say, "Can anything good come from Nazareth"? Yet the all-wise God decreed to send Christ from that small, despised town. God is the God of lowly, humble means to accomplish his eternal good pleasure. In doing so God exposes man as anti-God in all man's thoughts and purposes, and God reveals his glory as the sovereign one of all creation.

A man often overlooked as a model of the humble, ordinary footman is God's servant Elihu. Elihu? Exactly, Elihu. Elihu was not one of the great leaders or memorable characters of the pages of scripture. He appeared for a brief time, having little background and no explanation, only to vanish after his work was finished. What we know of Elihu is scarce, but the details that the Holy Spirit includes are exactly enough for "doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Elihu

The record of Elihu is found in the Old Testament book of Job. Elihu was the son of Barachel the Buzite of the kindred

of Ram (32:2). From this meager information, we gather that Elihu was from a family that knew the one true God. Elihu's name means *my God is he*, and Barachel means *God blesses*. These names instruct us not about some pagan god but about Jehovah God, the one true God. Elihu was from a family that knew Jehovah, and most likely Elihu was a relative of Abraham. Elihu was a Buzite, and Buz was one of Abraham's nephews, the son of Abraham's brother Nahor (Gen. 22:20–21). Many biblical historians say that Ram also refers to the family or kindred of Abraham. So Elihu was a relative of Abraham, of the line of Shem. This is a reason many date the book of Job as happening around or shortly after the time of Abraham.

That Elihu was a relative of Abraham means that Elihu lived in the sphere of the covenant. Perhaps the book of Job took place during the history when Abraham's seed still had relations with Nahor's seed. Examples would be Isaac's marrying Nahor's granddaughter, Rebecca, or Jacob's marrying Leah and Rachel, Nahor's great-granddaughters. After this history we hear no more of Nahor and his descendants, and we are led to believe that they apostatized and fell away in their generations, as God established his covenant with Nahor's brother Abraham and Abraham's seed.

The Spirit also saw fit in his wisdom to include that Elihu was the youngest of Job and his friends. Youth are often seen as foolish and inexperienced. Proverbs 22:15 teaches that foolishness is bound in the heart of children (youth). David calls upon God in Psalm 25:7 not to remember the sins of his youth. However, despite the relative dearth of knowledge about Elihu, his person is not the focus in recounting his history. It is good to set him in the proper context of the sphere of the covenant and to know of his youthfulness, but the man Elihu is not the point of this history. The word that Elihu brought is the point of this history. That is why only a single verse of Holy Writ is used to describe Elihu's entire backstory, and six chapters are spent on what he spoke to Job and his three friends. The word that Elihu brought, simply put, was the truth of who Jehovah God is, applied practically to Job's sin and situation in the world.

Elihu appeared on the scene as Job was finishing his replies to his other three friends at the end of Job 31. Job suffered tremendously at the hands of God, a history we likely know well. And Job's friends arrived at his house, as Job sat childless, virtually servant-less, bereft of livestock, covered in boils, and living with a wife who told him to curse God and die. As Job looked for an answer to his suffering, his three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—gave their speculations. Each began by supposing that Job had been walking in some sin, and each stated in so many words that this sin was the reason for Job's suffering.

In Job 4:7–8 Eliphaz stated, "Remember, I pray thee,

who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.”

This is a true statement; those who plow iniquity and sow wickedness reap perishing. But implied is that Job had been walking impenitently in sin and that God had sent the earthly circumstances of Job’s suffering as punishment.

In Job 8:6 Bildad not only implied that Job was living in sin, but Bildad also stated that that was the reason for Job’s calamity when Bildad said, “If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.”

Zophar took up the same charge—namely, that God had taken away Job’s wealth because Job was living impenitently in some sin. Zophar said, “If iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles” (11:14).

After Job answered his friends, denying that he was living in unrepentant sin, Job’s friends leveled specific charges at him—wild charges, charges with no grounds whatever. The friends accused Job of being uncharitable with his wealth, stealing, ignoring the poor and fatherless, lusting after women, and other gross sins. Job answered these charges, not because they merited a response but because Job took care to demonstrate that gross sin must not be the reason God had sent such immense suffering his way.

After Job’s lengthy response in chapters 27–31, the three friends had nothing more to say. Their mouths were stopped so no more foolishness could come out. However, Job still had no answer for his suffering. What was worse, Job had indeed sinned—not as an adulterer; not as a robber; and not as an uncharitable, avaricious man. His sin was not the reason God had brought the suffering, for this sin came in Job’s replies and speeches after his suffering began. Nonetheless, Job sinned. The three friends clearly were clueless of what that sin might be, for they certainly would have jumped on the opportunity to accuse Job of it. None would bring this sin to Job with a godly rebuke—that is, until Jehovah sent his own mouthpiece, his servant Elihu.

Job 32 begins with the introduction of Elihu. Elihu had watched some of what had occurred but most likely not all of it, for he did not have a speech of his own nor an introduction until Job had finished replying to all three friends. The answers Job gave evidently were satisfactory to the three friends, and they had no other charges, no other possible explanations for Job’s suffering. There was a period of silence from Job and from his friends.

Watching this unfold, Elihu knew exactly what Job’s sin was, but none of Job’s friends would cut the silence with the clear and obvious truth. As the writer introduces Elihu, the first thing we read is that Elihu’s wrath was

kindled (32:2). That is how he arrived on the scene, as one who was hopping mad with a holy anger, jealous for the glory of God. How could Job not see it? And how could the friends not see it? The text says that Elihu’s wrath was kindled against them too, for “they found no answer, and yet had condemned Job” (v. 3). They were not speaking the truth that Job needed to hear.

Elihu had been patient. He had watched, possibly for hours, expecting the truth to come out, as words were spoken, replies and rebuttals made, accusations made, and more explanations were given. After all, these men were older and wiser than he! Elihu said to the men, “I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom” (32:6–7).

Elihu later realized why the friends had not spoken the truth in wisdom, and he said, “But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding. Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment” (32:8–9).

Wisdom to discern the truth does not come by age, power, authority, position, or greatness. Wisdom does not come simply by becoming a church leader, going through seminary, having children and grandchildren, or reaching a certain age. There are plenty of foolish church leaders, ministers, parents, grandparents, and old men and women. And there are plenty of truly wise young children and uneducated adults in Jehovah’s army. That is because wisdom comes by the Spirit! And God certainly gave to Elihu the Spirit. Those older, great men did not see the truth, but God revealed it unto young Elihu.

Holy Wrath

Against Job and against his three friends was Elihu’s wrath kindled. That wrath was a fierce, burning anger. It was the kind of anger that absolutely cannot be contained and explodes from a person. “Behold,” Elihu said, “my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak, that I may be refreshed” (32:19–20). And yet his wrath was not an uncontrolled rage. Neither was Elihu’s wrath for his own sake due to some personal offense Job had caused. That would be wicked, unchristian wrath. But there is a holy, good, Christian wrath, even such a wrath that cannot be contained and bursts forth like poorly ventilated wine.

That wrath is God’s own wrath against all sin and iniquity as that sin and iniquity are an assault against his name and worthy of everlasting punishment. That wrath is essentially God’s holiness encountering any unholiness. That wrath, a hating and despising of sin as unholy and offensive to God’s name, was put into Elihu’s heart by the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit’s wrath against

Job's sin. Because it came from the Spirit of Christ, it was good, right, holy wrath that may never be condemned.

The false church will slander that wrath, calling it mean, hateful, overzealous, and unbalanced. Or perhaps they concede that it possibly could be appropriate in some sense, but not at that time, not in that way, and not in that place. If that holy, zealous anger were manifested in the false church off pulpits, in writing, in conversations after church or with family and friends, it would be silenced, slandered, and condemned. That is why scripture encourages true believers with comforting words such as Paul's in Galatians 4:18: "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you."

The believer need not worry if he is angered by sin for God's sake when he sees it in himself or others. He need not worry even if that anger is manifest in a sharp rebuke toward the sinner. He need not worry about that holy anger because of outward circumstances, where he is, or who he is with. In fact, the believer ought to rejoice that the Spirit gave to him God's own hatred and wrath toward sin. It is always good to be zealous for a good thing, and what better thing than the sake of the glory of God's name!

So what was the occasion for Elihu's wrath? Job 32:2 speaks plainly that it was Job's sin. But what exactly was Job's sin? There is much discussion and debate over what Job's sin specifically was, enough in which to get completely lost. If we are to understand what Job's sin was, we must look to Elihu's reason for anger. The text says that Elihu's wrath was kindled because Job had "justified himself rather than God."

Of all Job's friends recorded in this history, Elihu is the only one to receive an introduction like this before he spoke. That is scripture's way to affirm that Elihu was correctly identifying Job's sin. The other three friends were not angry; they could not be! Not in a righteous way. They could not identify Job's sin nor the reason for his suffering. It is apparent that they did not really believe the charges they had brought because their charges were not accompanied by a true, holy anger. But Elihu was angry, and he was spot on in the identification of Job's actual sin. Job had justified himself rather than God.

Throughout his replies Job had maintained that he was innocent, and therefore, there was no conceivable reason God should send such suffering upon Job. That was Job's sin; he justified himself and declared God as unjust in sovereignly bringing those immense trials into Job's life. God, according to Job, should not have done that. God was wrong, sinful, and unfair to do what he did.

No wonder Elihu was angry.

From a human perspective, however, this sin is almost understandable. Who among us does not question God's

reasons for sending trials into our lives? Now imagine you were Job: stripped of ten children, many servants, your livelihood, health, and earthly comforts in the space of a day. Would you complain the same way? "What did I do to deserve this, O God? Why have you done this to your servant, your child, your redeemed one? Surely there is no good reason this calamity befalls me!" I imagine most of us would think that God was unjust in his dealings too.

But sinful it absolutely was, for Job declared that God was not righteous in what he had done and that he, Job, was righteous. Later Elihu further explained the meaning of his charge when he said, "Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God's?" (35:2). One who examines Job's speeches will not find him saying these exact words. But Elihu was not lying or slandering Job; Elihu was pinpointing what Job's actions were declaring. Job was claiming to be more righteous than God. "God could not possibly have a good reason for bringing this suffering upon me," Job thought, "and I certainly would not have given someone like me this suffering."

Job dared to put himself in the judgment seat and ultimately to make himself God and to judge God for what God had done. Job said, "I am right; God is not!" Elihu summarized Job's sin again in chapter 34:5 when he said, "For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment." Job was saying that because of his innocence of great sin, God was not giving Job a fair trial and treating him justly. Job, therefore, attempted to un-God God as the perfect, righteous, and all-just one. Job questioned the dealings of the unfathomable God. Job, a concoction of dirt, replied against the infinite, majestic, creator of all things material and spiritual.

Elihu gave a harsh, pointed rebuke. One would think if Elihu had practiced charity he would have simply overlooked this sin amid all Job's agonizing hardships. After all, Job was a good man, perfect and upright (1:1). Job had not cursed God; in fact, after God originally had sent the trials, Job testified to God's blessedness (v. 21). But Elihu, filled with the holy zeal of the Holy Spirit, could not ignore and overlook Job's grievous sin. That would have been as impossible as God himself ignoring and overlooking that sin. Elihu was given the powerful grace of God to look past Job's person, as he swore to do (32:21–22), and he thundered a rebuke that Job might be humbled to dust.

A speech such as Elihu's would be ridiculed, hated, and mocked in the theological and ecclesiastical climate of today. The view of polemics, harsh language, and rebukes in general is that they are unfit for Christians and are to be kept out of the church, the preaching, and the lives of the members. This is rank unbelief that judges according to man's standards of what is acceptable and

appropriate and that is completely blind to view sin or false doctrine as God views them.

This unbelief dwells in our flesh too. We wince and cringe at strong polemics, harsh words of rebuke, and condemnation of sin and the lie. We mutter under our breaths that certain polemical statements should be said differently or not at all. We consider all too often what men may think of this or who might be offended by that. We put our fingers to the wind before weighing in on conversations with impassioned remarks. We often bite our tongues, quenching the Spirit's holy and necessary words of warning or rebuke. We judge according to our own foolishly dark standards, not according to the light that God reveals in his word. The truth is that all polemics, rebukes, or harsh words that are based upon principles of God's word are of God himself. To reject those polemics, silently criticize them, or fail to bring them is to reject and criticize Christ, who is that Word.

The spirit of zeal for God is antithetical to what lies in us by nature. Elihu's discourse was a clear manifestation of love for the glory of God's name and love for Job, whereas all that lies within us by nature is a virulent hatred for God and the neighbor. What Elihu spoke was not said in service of himself but in denial of himself, whereas all that is in our flesh is self-serving and looks only to our own best interests. It is not surprising that the church world hates the sentiments behind Elihu's speech because we know well that hatred lies in us too.

One of the church world's opinions of Elihu's speech is found in the Reformation Heritage Study Bible, chiefly edited by Rev. Joel Beeke and his team. The commentary given on Elihu's speech in Job 32–37 repeatedly claims that Elihu misrepresented Job, that Elihu took extreme quotes out of context, that Elihu did not have compassion upon Job in his suffering, and that Elihu displayed arrogance and a judgmental attitude toward Job.

The study Bible censors Elihu and condemns parts of his speech as unloving mischaracterization of Job. By nature we completely agree with this. "That is not loving!" we would say. "That is not nice! Poor Job, having to endure the false charges of his other three friends, and now this!"

But what does scripture say? Elihu certainly was a sinner, prone by nature to hate God and Job, his neighbor. Perhaps Elihu did sin. Perhaps the rebuke was too harsh. Perhaps he was unloving toward Job. Perhaps Elihu was just like Job's other friends, who falsely accused Job. Perhaps. But let us examine scripture as we judge Elihu's speech.

Elihu testified that his words came out of the Spirit in his heart (32:8). He spoke on behalf of God (36:2). He spoke out of the uprightness of his heart—the new man (33:3). This is strong evidence from scripture that Elihu's speech was indeed a good, holy rebuke.

To further demonstrate the uprightness of Elihu's speech, Job never replied or argued against Elihu. This is significant because most of the book of Job consists of the false accusations of the three friends and Job's lengthy responses to them, explaining why their musings on his suffering were dead wrong. But to Elihu's words Job could not offer a single defense. He was silent. Elihu even paused at one point, giving Job the opportunity to answer him. Elihu said in chapter 33:32, "If thou hast any thing to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee." Elihu said, "Job, if I am wrong, say something! I want you to be justified in this matter!" But Job said nothing, and chapter 34 simply continues with "Furthermore Elihu answered and said..." Job had no answer; the Spirit in him recognized the truth that Elihu had spoken by that same Spirit.

Again in Job 34:36 Elihu said that his goal was not to blindly accuse and belittle Job but to try him and to give Job the opportunity to defend himself. Elihu said, "My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men." Elihu wanted Job to be innocent. Elihu would have listened if Job replied again and claimed innocence of any sin of which Elihu had accused Job. But Job continued to remain silent.

Then there is God's seal upon the speech of Elihu. When God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, he rebuked Job's other three friends in Job 42:7–9. God specifically rebuked Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, but God did not rebuke Elihu. If Elihu had indeed sinned and misrepresented, slandered, or was uncompassionate toward Job, God would have rebuked Elihu. But Jehovah had sent Elihu to rebuke Job and put the very words of rebuke upon Elihu's lips. Elihu was God's mouthpiece. Young as Elihu was, unknown as he was, he was Jehovah's mouthpiece for this important work of rebuking Job, God's servant.

This is proved even further when we see that God restated the same points that he had spoken by Elihu. An example is chapter 40:8 when God said, "Wilt thou also disannul my judgment? wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?" It is almost precisely the charge brought by God's mouthpiece, Elihu. Elihu had not misrepresented Job, been uncharitable, or falsely accused Job, but Elihu had spoken God's own thoughts!

Elihu exercised the Christian freedom that all God's people possess to use God's word to judge matters and rebuke sin where stubbornness in sin is seen. The believer who is in Jesus Christ is completely free to rebuke! The believer is free of the condemnation of the law on that rebuke, which rebuke will be far from perfect. He is not saved by or through that rebuke in any way. Salvation is not dependent upon how flawless that rebuke is.

The believer is also free in that he has the right to

rebuke. Those outside Christ have no right to rebuke sin. They may not use a syllable of God's word, take it upon their lips, or apply it to any situation in their lives. They must, according to God's demand, but they have no right to God's holy word. They are unholy, and God's word may not be polluted with unclean lips. But in Christ the believer is restored the right freely to use God's word and to judge all matters with it.

The believer is free of respecting persons. He is free from all considerations and rules about rebukes set down by man. The believer does not need to feel guilty or ashamed for showing righteous wrath toward sin, regardless of what unbelieving men may say. The believer does not need to carve away at the rebuke to make it palatable to man's dark tastes. The believer does not need to wait for the right moment or the right place to make the rebuke or be concerned about bringing the rebuke at the wrong moment or in the wrong place. Such unbiblical restrictions made by man upon God's word are wicked attempts to bind and silence God as he wills to speak. The believer is free! He is free in love and holy zeal for God to take the word that is in his heart and apply a godly rebuke.

King of Creation

The meat of Elihu's rebuke of Job was hardly about Job. It was about God. It was specifically about God's sovereignty. Elihu brought the truth of God's sovereignty with the purpose to humble Job to nothing. There are many ways to speak to the child of God about God's sovereignty. The truth of God's sovereignty could be brought in connection with the gospel of God, who sent Jesus Christ to fully satisfy for all the sins of God's people at the cross and to sovereignly accomplish salvation. The truth of God's sovereignty could be brought to comfort one who suffers, so that he knows and is assured of God's absolute control over his life. But Elihu brought the truth of God's sovereignty for the purpose of abasing Job. And what more humbling doctrine is there than the doctrine of God's total sovereignty!

One might give a cursory thought to many of God's infinite attributes and perhaps not immediately be lowered to nothing. But that is very difficult to avoid when one considers God's sheer power, control, governance, and complete kingship over all existence. All men, living beings, plants, water, air, cells, atoms, heavenly bodies, energy, scientific forces, space, time, history, thoughts, purposes, actions, and spiritual beings are simultaneously controlled, governed, given existence, directed, willed, and purposed by I AM. All things imaginable and unimaginable that make up this universe and all spiritual realms are in God's absolute control.

This action of upholding and controlling all created reality does not tax God in the slightest. It is not difficult

for God to uphold and direct every blade of grass, grain of sand, star in heaven, moment in time, passing thought of man, and every rational and moral soul. Man hardly can begin to quantify these things, but God fashioned each one uniquely, upholds each constantly, and gives each a distinct purpose and goal in his creation. God neither sleeps nor slumbers, but he is ceaselessly active. God never waxes nor wanes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The truth of God's sovereignty humbles man to the dust, to wallowing in the dirt. The sovereignty of God makes man clay in the hands of the almighty potter. That truth removes even the thought that man could boast in anything. It makes man absolutely, positively, and definitely nothing. Nothing! The words of Psalm 8 come to mind and give force to this point. What is man, that God could possibly be mindful of him? He who controls the sun, moon, and stars; who stills his enemies and the avenger; who has everything in his power and directs all things is mindful of the dust that is man. Who can understand that?

It was that truth of God that Elihu spoke to Job. Job had exalted himself in his sinful mind to a place where he thought he could judge God and condemn what God did to him. Elihu responded, "Job, do you even know who God is? Job, do you even know who you are?"

God's sovereignty is a truth that all men must know. The reprobate must know it for their own condemnation as they hate that truth and press it down in their minds and souls. The elect must know it too. They must know and understand God's absolute sovereignty. They too are prone to puff up themselves with self-worth before God. They are prone to question when God sends this or that trial into their lives. They are prone to judge God, just as Job did, and ultimately to condemn God when things do not go their way according to their desires. The elect too must be humbled by the same truth that Elihu brought to Job. Who are you to dare to put yourself in the judgment seat and demand of God an answer? Do you even know who that God is whom you are judging? Do you know his holiness? Do you know his righteousness? Do you know his might and power? Have you the slightest idea how wicked it is to suggest to God that he should not have done this or that?

This focus of Elihu's polemic begins in Job 35. There is evidence of it from the beginning, but chapter 35 is where he becomes the most explicit. "Look unto the heavens, and see," he said in verse 5, "and behold the clouds which are higher than thou." Already Elihu had humbled Job by pointing to an earthly picture. But Elihu continued, "If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?" (vv. 6-7).

Elihu explained that God in his sovereignty is completely independent of the actions of man. Whether a man sins or is righteous, whether he obeys or disobeys, whether he believes in God or not, it does nothing to the being of the almighty God. Whether man thanks God or not, whether man praises God or not, whether man acknowledges God or not, God is completely unchanged and unmoved. Sins of men and devils cannot injure God in any respect, and righteous acts of men and angels cannot add anything to God. Man cannot rob anything from God, nor can man extend his hand and give something to God. Even when men attempt to steal God's glory, deny him, or corrupt his truth in their minds and lives, God is not diminished or affected whatsoever. God does not depend upon man; God does not change due to man's actions or responses; and God needs nothing from man. God's will and decree do not adjust to accommodate the doings of man, and God's plan can never be thwarted.

What a comfort this is to a child of God! The elect child's sins cannot change God's will to save him! The elect child's good works do not have the purpose of obtaining, possessing, or maintaining his salvation! God is unaffected by man, and God's salvation of his elect people never changes or is dependent upon them. God is independent of man, and so the salvation that God chooses to bestow is also independent of man. Man, rather, whether he is a sinner or a righteous man, is completely dependent upon God.

"Behold," Elihu continued, "God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out" (36:26). Then by examples from God's creation, Elihu proved that man cannot comprehend God in his greatness. God's greatness is indescribably magnificent! His control over all things is utterly unfathomable!

What follows are examples from creation that the Spirit gave to Elihu that point to God's sovereignty. In chapter 36:27–33, Elihu testified of God's creation of raindrops and clouds. Elihu began by speaking of God's creating the small drops of rain. Each raindrop, small and insignificant though each may seem, is made individually by the almighty God of the heavens. Then God stores those tiny droplets of water in clouds that spread across the expanse of the sky. Those massive clouds, weighing millions of tons each, block out the light and warmth of the sun and empty rain upon the earth.

Continuing to exposit the sermon spoken by the creation, Elihu turned to the thunder and the lightning. The sound of thunder pictures the very voice of the king of all creation. The thunder is an excellent, powerful testimony to God's greatness and sheer might. The earth shakes; the beasts tremble; the habitations of man shiver; and man is frightened. With the accompanying lightning a streak of electricity, burning at thousands of degrees Fahrenheit,

strikes the earth. Trees are set ablaze and split in half; power across cities is knocked out; and wildfires are ignited. As Jehovah's voice, his thunder and lightning speak and proclaim Jehovah, the God of creation who possesses all power and glory and the God who must be worshiped.

The creation has still more to say; its sermon is not complete. Elihu turned next to the snow and to the rain, specifically, to storms of snow and rain that God sends that cease all labor and all activity. In chapter 37:7 Elihu said, "He sealeth up the hand of every man; that all men may know his work." The work of man's hand is stopped when God sends a massive snowstorm or torrential rain. In a modern example, perhaps the storm knocks out all power or makes driving conditions too hazardous. Man simply must sit and watch the storm unfold, and that is God's purpose. God will have man undistracted with man's labor and the things of the world for a time to witness God's awesome majesty and to know that he alone is God! Few things occur on earth that are quite as humbling as when God sends his storms. Of course, the elect to whom God gives faith will see and know their God and praise his majesty. The unbeliever will hold down that knowledge of God in unrighteousness, but he cannot escape that testimony sent to him by God.

Elihu spoke next of what we might call more extreme weather phenomena: whirlwinds, strong winds, extreme heat, extreme cold, and the like. These are sent by God too. He is completely sovereign over the tornados and hurricanes and holds them in his hand. He blows his wind and levels buildings and forests, completely and forever changing landscapes and bringing death and destruction. He forms the ice and blows the frost upon the land, bringing cold that cannot be imagined and in which man is helpless to survive. God sends extreme heat waves against which man is equally helpless as he attempts to prevent his body from overheating.

In the spirit of Elihu's speech, an example of God's sovereignty to which many of us can relate occurred in the more northern part of our world not long ago. Many of us, including me, recently were privileged to see a glimpse of the northern lights. As I looked up and my entire field of vision was filled with massive ribbons of color, constantly shifting and changing the whole appearance of the sky, I imagined how many hundreds of miles those lights covered. I experienced a feeling of incredible smallness and an overwhelming sense of helplessness. Some gigantic event that I was completely powerless to affect was happening in the upper thermosphere hundreds of miles above me, hundreds of miles long, and unphased by what was happening below. And now that I know that those lights are charged particles of sunlight pummeling the earth's atmosphere from ninety-three million miles away at a terrific speed, it creates an even larger, grander picture. And I

understand that we saw very little of what someone living around the Arctic Circle would commonly see. I cannot grasp the scale of what I witnessed that night. And yet God not only understands and knows the northern lights, but he sent them. God is sovereign over them and directed each color, flicker, and shimmer. He did that to show his power and Godhead and to reveal that he alone is God to all men, including myself. As God revealed himself as God with that event, he also exposed man as nothing.

What Elihu brought to bear in all these examples was man's utter powerlessness over against these aspects of the creation for the purpose of humbling Job. These are everyday occurrences upon God's footstool and are common enough to man. Yet man is subject to them. He cannot overpower them. He cannot stop them or send them at his whim. He cannot withstand them in his weakness and frailty. He cannot even comprehend them! Elihu said to Job, "Dost thou know when God disposed them, and caused the light of his cloud to shine? Dost thou know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?" (37:15–16).

Man can only stop and watch in awe as God unfolds his eternal counsel in the sending of the massive clouds, terrifying thunderstorms, powerful whirlwinds, frigid snowstorms, and sweltering heat. Man's work stops; perhaps his home or town is destroyed; perhaps he cannot go outside or use electricity. And there is nothing man can do. Man must simply wait for the storms and their results to pass and sit in awe of his creator.

God is sovereign over these aspects of the creation and all things. He wills them; he decrees them; he sends them where he wants, in the intensity he wants, and for as long as he wants. He is the creator of them, the governor of them, and he issues them forth as an army, for he is the Lord of hosts. As an army they go forth in God's purposes to glorify himself and to show all men that he alone is God.

What is man compared to these things? He is small and unnoticed. He is a grain of sand swallowed up by a stormy sea. And these are only earthly things. What is man compared to the everlasting, infinite God? If this is what God can work and has complete control over, then what is man? Does that humble you? Are you brought to dust before the God of all creation? God used these truths along with a strong rebuke to humble Job to the point where Job said in chapter 40:4, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth."

Sovereignly Saved

But that is not all that God would speak to Job through Elihu. Yes, God had used Elihu to sufficiently humble Job to the dust, and soon God personally would come in the whirlwind to affirm the truth that Elihu had spoken. But

a man never will come to the point of freely confessing his vileness and later repenting in dust and ashes if God only speaks of his greatness, majesty, and his power over all things. All men know this; God reveals it to them by the creation, as Elihu proved. This knowledge is only sufficient to condemn man and leave him without excuse, as Belgic Confession article 2 states.

Man knows that there is a God; man knows the power and majesty and sovereignty of God; man knows that God demands obedience and worship; yet man cannot, will not, and cannot even will to give that worship. Man at best can only shiver and quake before God in the face of that knowledge; but that apparent terror before God is still born of unbelief. Man attempts to run from God like Jonah, or he might even cry for the mountains to fall on him like the ungodly will do at the return of Christ. Ordinarily, man simply suppresses that truth in his mind and soul to avoid the terrifying reality that he is not right with God.

Because of God's particular, sovereign grace toward Job, Elihu also spoke words of comfort. Those words of comfort were the gospel, and the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit works faith in God's people. Only by faith can one be stilled in his soul and dare to approach the living God without terror. That is because faith looks not to itself, to faith's worth, or to the goodness of the works that flow out of faith for peace, assurance, or being right before God. Faith looks to Jesus Christ, Job's redeemer and the redeemer of all God's elect. "For I know," said Job in chapter 19:25, "that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." In Christ alone the child of God finds all comfort, peace, and knowledge of his righteousness before God. On the cross Christ accomplished for all his sheep that righteousness, comfort, and peace, and he bestows those blessings to them through the gift of faith.

God commissioned the footman Elihu to rebuke Job for his sin of demanding that God answer Job for the reason of his suffering. Elihu was to expose Job's sin of making himself more righteous than God and judging God as guilty and himself as innocent. Elihu was appointed to humble Job to dust by showing Job the total nothingness of man and bringing over against that God's awesome sovereignty. As a soldier that was Elihu's main duty. But God's other purpose for Elihu was to prelude the glorious gospel that God in the whirlwind would bring more fully toward the end of book. Elihu precluded the gospel in Job 36 with these beautiful words:

5. Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom.
6. He preserveth not the life of the wicked: but giveth right to the poor.

7. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted.
8. And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction;
9. Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded.
10. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.
11. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.
12. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge.
13. But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath: they cry not when he bindeth them.
14. They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean.
15. He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression.

These words highlight the gospel especially in its antithetical character. The gospel was delivered as an antithetical promise in Eden in Genesis 3:15, and that antithesis is carried out throughout all church history. It is not surprising but expected that the gospel promise that Elihu delivered to Job and to all God's people was an antithetical promise. God's promise to the wicked, disobedient, hypocrites, and unclean is that God will destroy them utterly in his just wrath. That is a sure, unchangeable, just promise. Those who are described by those words cannot escape God's judgment but should expect it to come, for God is holy and filled with wrath against all iniquity.

This negative side of the promise is an essential part of the gospel that God's people may never forget. Who are the wicked, disobedient, hypocrites, and unclean but us by nature! Destruction and wrath are what Job deserved. That is what all God's people deserve. God's wrath does not simply go away. Sin cannot and will not be overlooked. God must and does destroy the ones responsible for sin. The ones responsible for the sins of God's people, however, are not God's people. The one alone who is responsible for the sins of God's people is Jesus Christ.

Christ was cut off, forsaken by God. Christ was destroyed in his body and soul his whole life long and especially at the cross. He went to hell on the cross, and there he suffered the full torment and anguish of hell. He was destroyed and forsaken for our sins, for we deserved that very punishment and everlasting destruction in hell. But that precisely is the gospel! I deserve punishment; I deserve all the pain and torment and suffering of hell; and Jesus Christ delivered me from that suffering by his perfect substitution on the accursed tree. I am the wicked, the disobedient, and the hypocrite; and for

me Christ became all those things to save me from the wrath of God.

Now the positive side of the gospel that Elihu brought is made clear. God gives right to the poor; he never withdraws his eyes from the righteous; he delivers the poor and opens their ears. First, the righteous one and poor, afflicted one is Christ as he lived a perfect life on this earth and suffered miserably at the hands of all men. Second, the righteous and poor are all the elect in Jesus Christ as they are righteous in him and as they are manifest in the world by the power of the Spirit. The elect are righteous in Christ and seen as perfect through his work. And by the power of the Spirit, a mark of their election is their spiritual poverty. The elect have nothing in themselves. They know themselves to be empty of all goodness and blessedness and gifts whereby to obtain the favor of God. The elect know their sin, misery, and nothingness. The promise of God to the elect and to them only is that God will deliver them and exalt them for Christ's sake. God will forgive their sins; he will pardon all their iniquities; he will preserve them in this life and the next; and he will glorify (exalt) them forever in the new heavens and earth because of the work of their savior, Jesus Christ. The promise is particular to the poor and to the righteous because the promise is particular to the elect. The elect are made righteous and poor, so this promise is for them only.

These truths also explain Elihu's words in Job 36:10–12.

10. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.
11. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.
12. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge.

These verses may appear to be conditional. They appear to place a necessary activity of man before a blessing of God. But this is a promise of God—an unconditional promise of God antithetically manifested. Remember, God is sovereign. That sovereignty, according to Elihu, is that God is not affected by the actions, sins, or even good works of man. God simply is; and his plan, decree, will, and being are unchangeable and unmovable.

These verses describe God's dealings with the two different kinds of people that God decreed to be in the world. The "if" is not conditional but is an "if" that describes two different realities. It is not an "if" such that if a man would obey and serve God, then God would see to it that that man spends his days in prosperity and years in pleasure. But it is an "if" such that when a hearer is seen obeying God's voice and serving him, that hearer is manifest as someone to whom God

has promised prosperity and pleasure. When the word of God comes, one of two things will happen: either the hearer will obey and serve God, or the hearer will not obey. If that hearer is an elect child of God who has been given faith, he will obey and serve, and God always gives to his elect prosperity and pleasure. If the hearer is an unregenerate reprobate, he will disobey, and God always gives the reprobate to perish.

There are those who do not obey God, hardened in sin and unbelief, and they perish outside Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not die for them; they were not chosen to be saved by God; therefore, they do not receive faith and do not receive the Spirit. They are the reprobate, forever decreed by God to be disobedient to him and to perish justly in their sins.

And there are those whom God chooses, the elect. They too are sinners. They require discipline, Job 36:10 says. They are caught up in iniquity. They are no better; they are no different, not distinguishing themselves from those who are not chosen by God. And God in his sovereign, particular grace chooses to give to them faith worked by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit marks them in the world as God's people; and as marked by the Spirit, they are also turned from sin by the same Spirit. They repent, obey God's voice to turn from sin, and spend their lives serving God from new, regenerated hearts. These are fruits of God's choice of them in eternity, fruits earned by Jesus Christ on the cross, powerfully brought to them by the Word and Holy Spirit, and worked in their hearts efficaciously.

We see here God's grace and mercy on full display. He chooses some in eternity, who did not deserve to be the objects of that choice, and he chooses to turn them from their wicked ways. And God further promises them prosperity and pleasure with an unchanging, sovereign, and unconditional promise. Not earthly prosperity, not earthly pleasure, but the prosperity of the riches of salvation in Jesus Christ and the pleasure of a sinner knowing that he has peace with the sovereign, almighty God. Not because the elect obey and serve God but because God chose them in love and sent Jesus Christ to die for them. Their election also guarantees that they will obey God and serve him.

Only through the lens of God's sovereignty, which Elihu established throughout the polemic, can we understand this twofold promise of God. Because God is sovereign, the promise must be unconditional. The promise will certainly, infallibly, surely come to pass, regardless of anything that man might do or say. The promise that God sovereignly carries out to the reprobate is their just destruction, perishing, and eternal death. God carries

out his plan for their disobedience, impenitence, and final perdition. God does not author the disobedience or impenitence, but he decreed that the reprobate would choose and perform the evil, and he judges them accordingly for those choices and actions. God is sovereign in damnation, just as he is sovereign over each individual snowflake in a snowstorm, the strength and speed of a whirlwind, and the precise point where lightning will strike. According to God's decree, the reprobate will not hear God's word and turn from sin; they will not obey his voice; and they will just as certainly be sent to hell.

The promise sovereignly carried to the elect is their salvation, and that includes all their turning from sin and lives of service to God. God is sovereign over all salvation; nothing is left to chance or to the will of man. That would make God no longer sovereign but dependent. At no point will God wait for man to respond to his commands or hinge his actions upon the obedience of man. This too would make God no longer sovereign but dependent. No, God is as sovereign over salvation as he is over the individual drops of water in a rainstorm, the exact shape and mass of the clouds, and the intensity and duration of a heat wave. The elect will certainly turn from sin; they will certainly serve God; and they will just as certainly receive the spiritual promise of prosperity and peace.

In the truth of God's sovereignty, God's people are safe. They can never fall away and can never be plucked out of their Father's hand, regardless of their sins and sinful nature against which they struggle all their lives; regardless of the wiles and attacks of Satan upon them and the church; and regardless of the machinations of wicked men, who hate God and his chosen elect. In fact, not even regardless of all these things but through them. God uses wicked men, the devil, and even the sins of the elect children of God to serve their salvation! That is how sovereign God is! While men and the devil and even the child of God at times mean evil, God means all things for the good of his elect church. That is the immeasurable comfort afforded through the truth of the sovereignty of our God.

That sovereignty Job heard from Elihu, God's footman. Elihu was a humble, unremarkable footman in Jehovah's army, who was given a mighty task to bring a polemical word of rebuke and to extol the amazing power, majesty, and grace of God. It was not about the footman; it was about the truth that he spoke. And that truth, though hated and rejected by many, is a truth that stands forever to the glory of God's name and the salvation of Christ's church.

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Let love be without dissimulation.
Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.* — Romans 12:9

All things in the church must be carried on in love. God is love. He loves himself as the highest good and seeks his own glory. God loves Jesus Christ and the elect in Christ. In love God predestinated his people. In love God reconciled his people to himself. Being reconciled, God pours his love into their hearts; and they love God, Christ, and the saints.

Love for the saints is what the apostle has in view in this text. Love for the saints is the infallible fruit of our free justification. Knowing the love of God, we love the people of God. That love suffers long, is kind, does not envy, does not vaunt or puff up itself, does not behave unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, and does not rejoice in iniquity but in truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

In the church alone there is true, genuine, sincere love of the saints.

Let love be without dissimulation! We need to hear that admonition!

Yes, in our hearts there is that true and sincere love of the brother and sister. But we have a lot of flesh. And the flesh does not love the neighbor but hates him. It belongs to the hatred of the neighbor that we dissemble with him. We hate our neighbors, but we pretend that we love them.

Hypocrite! That is the word for dissimulation.

We are actors who play that we love our neighbors, but there is hatred in our hearts toward them. That pretending is a pleasant smile, a warm handshake, and a kind word, but we loathe our neighbors. That pretending is a word to the poor to be warmed and to be filled, but we give him nothing with which to warm and to fill himself. That pretending is to come to church, sit in the pew, pray together, listen to the word together, and sit at the table of the Lord together, but there is loathing in our hearts.

Dissembling love! Let love be without dissimulation!

Necessary root! Abhor that which is evil. Cleave to that which is good.

The apostle means *evil* in the widest sense of the word—evil in our relationships to God, to the world, and to one another. When we dissemble with our love, then we do that because we cleave to that which is evil and shun the good. In our relationships with one another, we slander and backbite and have malice. Abhor these things. Not merely that we do not do the evil but that we abhor evil with our minds and hearts.

Cleave to the good—good as it is that spiritual, ethical, and moral goodness in relationship to God, to the world, and to one another, especially truth, righteousness, and honesty. Dissimulation is a species of the lie. Abhor the lie. Cleave to the truth.

For dissimulation—hypocrisy—is the leaven of the Pharisees. And a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Once dissimulation enters the church, dissimulation takes over every aspect of life in the church. No one is true to each other or with each other! Church-life becomes an act.

Let love be without dissimulation! Yes, love one another with a pure heart fervently!

—NJL