

The background features a stylized green illustration. On the left, a sword is shown in profile, pointing upwards and to the right. On the right, a hand is depicted holding a shield. The shield is circular and has several smaller circles on its surface, representing rivets or decorative elements. The entire illustration is rendered in a light green color against a white background.

SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Fifth Annual Meeting Edition

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

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

Signed letters and submissions of general interest may be sent to the editor in chief at natelangerak@att.net or to

Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
705 Pettibone St
Crown Point, IN 46307

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Reformed Believers Publishing
325 84th St SW, Suite 102

Byron Center, MI 49315

Website: reformedbelieverspub.org

Email: office@reformedbelieverspub.org

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The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. — Psalm 90:10

OH, HOW FLEETING!

To be the friend of God in Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the only thing that makes this life worth living. For outside of Christ there is only vanity and vexation of spirit.

Moses must remind us of that because we become enchanted with this world and the things of this world—bewitched by its sights, sounds, tastes, and experiences. In our stupors we forget heaven and our everlasting home in a perfect creation full of the glory of God. But all man's life in the world must come to an end.

The word “it” in the text refers to man's life in the world with its relationships, labors, and sorrows. Man's life is quickly cut off, and we fly away, both the righteous and the wicked.

Moses speaks of ends. He has in view the ends of days, months, years, and lives. The time of the end is always a time for reflection, as it was in Psalm 90 for Moses at the end of his life of one hundred twenty years, when his eyes had not grown dim and his natural force had not at all abated in him. Yet his lifespan was cut off, and he flew away.

So every man's lifespan must be cut off.

At his end Moses reflects on Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, during which time a whole generation was cut off because of unbelief and God swore in his wrath that that generation would not enter into his rest. Among that generation some might have lived seventy or eighty years, but many did not. That generation was cut off in the wilderness. For forty years Moses had witnessed that generation perish there outside the land of promise by serpents, by the fire of the Lord that burned in the camp, by disease, by pestilence, and by a host of other causes. That generation was cut off and flew away.

Now at last Moses must trudge from the plains of Moab to the top of Mount Nebo, where the Lord showed Moses all the land of Canaan and where he must meet his end. And he writes of our ends as his last bit of instruction to Israel as the nation is poised now to enter the land of promise with a new generation.

For us another year has passed! We have stepped that

much closer to our graves. It seems that we were just wishing each other a happy new year, and now another new year is upon us.

Oh, how fleeting!

While men—we—rush along on the streams of time, men—we—are far too often ignorant of the reality of which Moses speaks in Psalm 90. Partly this is because we are created with time and are subservient to time and because we are so limited with respect to time. We cannot see a moment ahead in time. Partly this is because we are so caught up in the daily grind of time that we hardly notice its swift passage. We also have sinful natures that would like to make the earth of this time our home and to forget that we hurtle toward our ends in this world.

Yet a sober fact.

Our lives in the world are soon cut off, and we fly away!

This is sure and certain.

Men might boastfully try to contradict these facts, but these facts remain sure and certain because they are God's word about his dealings with the sons of men.

Wicked men might boastfully say that their houses shall endure forever. Men might even take steps that outwardly and at first glance appear to contradict the facts of the text. Men write their names on buildings, monuments, businesses, trust funds, and important accomplishments in hopes of lasting fame. The pharaohs erected their pyramids to achieve immortality. The pyramids do stand yet today in the deserts of Egypt. But what are those pyramids in reality? They are huge monuments to the facts of the text. They are more akin to the toppled figure of Ozymandias, as pictured in the following poem:

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—“Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert...Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;

And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”¹

Vain boast!

The fact that Ozymandias’ crumbled monument remains while he is gone teaches loudly and clearly for all to hear that man is cut off and flies away.

If we sit and contemplate this fact, then we will agree also with Moses on the other facts of the text. Seventy years are the days of our lives. Occasionally man reaches eighty years, if strength is great. And the best that can be said of that time is that it was labor and sorrow.

For life is quickly cut off, and we fly away!

In the quickly passing succession of moments, especially at certain points in our lives, time can seem as though it virtually stands still. The seconds seem like hours. The minutes are like days. Time for us can seem to plod along. Yet if we could see time from eternity, then time would move like a rushing mountain stream and like the howling wind that sweeps across a treeless and unbroken plain.

The reality of time is that time flies away.

Time is but a creature of God, created to be the instrument to carry all things along in the unfolding of his eternal counsel, wherein he demonstrates the riches of his wisdom and the glory of his name. Time was created in the beginning as the condition of all creaturely life. To be a creature is to be subject to time and to live and to move in time. The creature—not even the angels and certainly not mortal man—can never be eternal or exist outside of time.

Mighty creature is time.

Wonderful task that God has given to time.

To God alone belongs the perfection of eternity. To be eternal is to be exalted above time and above all succession of moments. God in his eternity is exalted above time; and he beholds time, with all its progress and movement and succession of moments, in a single instant. In his counsel all time is before him, and in that counsel all things that he will unfold in time are perfect and perfectly accomplished already.

Time is God’s creature and is for his creatures. The creature must dwell in time and take part in history. Even in heaven, and in the new heavens and the new earth, this is true. Heaven is not timeless. The new heavens and the new earth will be a new age, an everlasting age, yet they will be subject to time, in which every second will be

devoted to the glory of God in righteousness and perfection. In hell too, in the punishment and torment of the wicked, every moment will be perfectly devoted to the glory of God. If we could see time now with a perfect eye, we would see that even here every moment and all that transpires in each moment is for the glory of God. Yet it is not so transparent. Time itself will have reached its appointed end here in this age, and time itself will have been redeemed in the age to come, when time will be the condition for the resplendent and transparent display of the glory of God in everything.

And time, therefore, never stands still. Time rushes headlong like a mountain torrent freshly swollen with melted snow.

That time moves and rushes along is because God controls time. He does not disinterestedly behold time and the events of it, but he thoroughly determines every millisecond of time and all that occurs within each millisecond.

And God actively controls every moment of time according to his counsel. He moves time along. He hastens time on its journey from the beginning of history to the end of the world and the coming of the purpose that he appointed before all worlds in his counsel, so that time is but the unfolding of God’s counsel.

Eternally active, eternally the same, eternally changeless in his being and in all his perfections, and eternally at rest in himself is the God of time.

And he is the God of men’s lives in time!

And what is God’s word to men in time? “It is soon cut off, and we fly away!”

With those words Moses sums up the life of mortal man in time. It is quickly cut off, and we fly away!

“It” in the text refers to the span of a man’s life of seventy or eighty years, along with all man’s relationships and all his labor that God gives for those few moments. The days of man’s years are quickly cut off. Time is flying; and as creatures of time, we fly with it.

And we fly away!

The words “fly away” are used for the rising of sparks from a fire. Sparks shoot up out of the fire with so much vigor that they quickly fade and fall. The words are used for the flit and the flutter of a bird that cannot sit still for more than a moment. The words are used for the fleeting nature of a dream, which is so real for a moment. Then as quickly as the dream began, it is gone and forgotten.

The words “fly away” teach the relentlessly fleeting nature of every man’s life. There is endless movement, constant flux, and manifold transition in a man’s life. It relentlessly hurries along. No moment is the same. Like

1 Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Ozymandias*, in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald H. Reiman (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 109, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46565/ozymandias.

the waters of a stream pass a place and return to it no more, so does man hurry along in time.

The words “fly away” teach us the transitory nature of every man’s life. We fly away to somewhere else. This life is not permanent, and man flies away to his permanent abode, whether heaven or hell.

The words “soon cut off” teach us the brevity of a man’s life. Death is the instantaneous cutting off of all earthly relationships, achievements, activity, breath, and movement. Those words also teach us that death does not simply happen as though it were a natural part of a circle of life that operates in the world.

Rather, someone is active in death. God is active in the cutting off of men. His word spoken to Adam in the garden when Adam fell into sin was the word of death. That word is active in the life of every one of Adam’s descendants. Moses refers to that word of God in verse 3: “Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, [to dust], ye children of men.” That is God’s word over the whole human race, and that word is active in the life of every man. That word works quickly, so that man’s life is but the blink of an eye in history; and that word cuts off quickly, so that one moment man is breathing and the next he is gone.

There are the days of a man’s years that are given to him. Each lifespan properly laid out has its seconds, minutes, days, and years. Each man receives his appointed time for just so long, just so many days, minutes, and seconds and not a moment longer. From the moment of his conception, the seconds turn into minutes, the minutes into hours, the hours into days, the days into years, and man is cut off and flies away.

Do you want to know just how fleeting is this mortal life? and also then the character of this fleeting, mortal life?

Listen to Moses, the man of God: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”

Seventy are the days of our years; eighty years if strength is great.

When Moses says that the days of our years are seventy—and if by reason of strength they be eighty—he is not referring to the average or to a reasonable length of time that a man may expect to live in this life, but Moses is referring to the upper end of the days of our years. If a man and woman have lived to seventy years or if by reason of strength have attained to eighty, they have reached the upper limit of human life according to God’s word.

Oh, how fleeting are our lives!

Our lives are fleeting in comparison to human history, which is around six thousand years old. Barely a blink of an eye, but our lives are particularly quick in comparison to the endless expanses of the time to come, in which ten thousand years will be like a day.

Some will attain seventy or eighty years. But that is the upper limit!

Man will mock at that. He will point to his nutritional and medical advances as though he can change the Lord’s word. With all his might man strives to overcome a lifespan of seventy or eighty years.

But such is the word of God. Some will attain seventy or eighty years. The centenarian is living on the edge of a very sharp knife posed to cut him down.

Most are cut off and fly away before that. There are billions of babies whose lives are only a few days or months in their mothers’ wombs. Millions of children last but a few days, months, or years outside the womb in this sin-cursed world. Young men and women are cut down by the billions, having barely achieved twenty years of age. Men and women labor all their lives to retire early, and their lives are cut short at age fifty. Millions perish in their prime from disease, war, famine, pestilence, and a thousand different afflictions.

By far most do not reach seventy or eighty years.

Man may speak differently now. “Most children,” man will say, “now survive past childhood. Many live until they are ninety. We have medicines, hospitals, doctors, and vaccines.”

But the word of God is seventy or eighty years.

That is the limit God has placed on man’s life. For some life is cut off quickly in youth, for others death comes after their seventieth or eightieth year, but quickly for all that. One moment we are born; then as in a moment, we are thirty, then fifty, then seventy, and we are cut off, and we fly away! One moment, so it seems, we are holding our newborn children in the hospital, then holding their hands as they walk down the aisle, then holding our grandchildren, then we are cut off, and we fly away.

And what is the quality of our lives in all those years?

The strength of them is labor and sorrow!

What if a man lives eighty years? Some may boast of that and say, “He lived a good, long, full life!”

What a vain boast according to the text. The strength of our years is labor and sorrow.

The word “strength” is used for boast, pride, or prime. When Moses says this, he is saying that the boast, the strength, the prime of life, the very best of those eighty years is labor and sorrow.

The word “labour” indicates the backbreaking toil that characterizes a man’s life in the world that is under the curse of God. The word “sorrow” indicates all the trouble that accompanies that work.

All our labors are nothingness, vanity, sin, and accompanied with sorrow. We can understand that in a purely physical sense. When men and women are in their prime, that is the prime time to work, and with that work comes sorrow. During that time they build their businesses,

establish themselves in the world, raise their families, and make their plans. But what is that?

Labor accompanied with sorrow!

But Moses is not talking about mere labor and sorrow in a purely physical sense. He means labor and sorrow in light of that killing word of God: “Return to dust, ye sons of men!”

It is laboring in a world that is under the curse of God, that has been subjected to vanity, so that a man eats his bread in the sweat of his brow, and the ground brings forth thorns and thistles. It is the labor of a woman to whom God multiplies the sorrows of her conceptions. It is the labor of bloodied knuckles, weary bones, tired muscles, and exhausted minds and spirits. It is the labor and sorrow of man, who is conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins. For the natural man all his labor is nothing but sorrow because he goes to hell at the end of it. For the child of God, the labor is undertaken with a sinful human nature, so that all that labor is accompanied with sin and then also with sorrow. If we would look at all our labors, we would see sorrow, sorrow multiplied, and a daily increase of sin, so that even if a man would live seventy or eighty years, all he could boast about would be labor and sorrow, and with that God is not satisfied. He demands perfection, so that even our labors and sorrows serve for our condemnation.

Then our lives are cut off, and we fly away.

The finality of death!

A man passes his whole life in labor and sorrow, and he rushes headlong with breakneck speed toward the end, and he is cut off and flies away. Like a tree cut down, he lies where he fell.

Exactly because a man is cut off and flies away, concerning those seventy or eighty years he can only boast of labor and sorrow. He flies away from this life to the judgment seat of God, where man’s whole life is cast in the brilliant and searching spotlight of God’s righteousness and holiness.

How fleeting is man’s life! The duration of a spark that shoots up from a fire.

How fragile! Like a puff of air. Like the grass. All man’s beauty is as the flower of the field. The grass withers, and the flower fades.

We might say that Moses is too bleak. Today he would be characterized as too somber and pessimistic about life. He would be labeled a holiday-cheer killer, a wet blanket on the atmosphere of merriment. We have many conveniences and comforts to alleviate the sufferings of this life, many new inventions to ease our labors, and good medicines and doctors to ward off death. Is there no joy in the world? Is life all vanity and vexation of spirit?

But then let our lives, our activities, our purposes, and our hearts be cast in the powerful spotlight of God’s eternality, his brilliant and unapproachable holiness, his awesome righteousness, his judgments and the terrible finality of his verdicts, and the crushing power of his wrath and anger. Let that word ring in the ears of every man: “Return to dust, ye sons of men!” That word is operative in the life of every one of the sons of Adam, and that word works inextricably upon every one of those sons of Adam in every aspect of his life, in all his activities and labors, to pull him down into the grave.

And then let us cast ourselves at the foot of the cross of Jesus, God’s Son and our Lord. He is all that is beautiful in the world. He is God’s grace, beauty, and light that has broken into this world of cursing, ugliness, darkness, vanity, and death.

Yes! Jesus willingly and graciously took on himself that terrible word: “Return to dust, ye sons of men!” He labored under that word. He sorrowed under that word with the wrath of God resting upon him.

Look at him!

Is there any sorrow like his sorrow?

Excruciating!

God saw and was satisfied! With all the brilliance of God’s holiness, the awesomeness of his righteousness, and the crushing power of his wrath, God saw Jesus’ laboring soul and was satisfied with his anguish and suffering. Jesus was born, crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hellish agonies on the cross; he arose the third day as the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings; and he brought to light life and immortality.

Apart from faith in Jesus’ name, there is only the swift and inextricable passage of time for man. Man has his allotted time, and man is cut off and flies away to an eternity of sorrow; and his house, which he supposed would last forever, crumbles into ruins. Man cannot ever have rest apart from faith in Jesus Christ and his completed and finished work. There are only seventy or eighty years of sorrow, and then man is cut off into eternal misery.

But all who look to Jesus Christ in faith are satisfied and made to rejoice and to be glad, and in him also the work of their hands—Jesus’ own work in and through them—is established by God for good.

And then also in Jesus Christ by true faith, the light afflictions of the swift passage of time, which are but for a moment and quickly pass, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. For our lives are quickly cut off, and we fly away to an eternal home fixed in the heavens and appointed to us from all eternity, where there is no more sorrow and where every tear is dried.

—NJL

A new year is upon us! All things change, but what stays the same is the Lord, our God. He does not change in himself, and he does not change in his purpose to save his people. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. How does that not comfort his people?

We rush toward our end, but that end is glorious in Christ. It is the end that opens to the new beginning in heaven. What hope we have!

To the work of publishing that hope and all the truth connected with that hope, *Sword and Shield* is dedicated. As *Sword and Shield* enters the new year, the purpose of the magazine has not changed. The purpose is to publish the truth, specifically the glorious truth of the Reformed faith and as that is maintained in the Reformed Protestant Churches.

The magazine is not a church paper; and if it ever becomes one, then it should be put out of its misery quickly. We are free to criticize churches and specifically the Reformed Protestant Churches. The paper does not have its right to existence in the institute of the church but in the office of believer, to whom is given the glorious privilege of confessing the name of Jesus in the world. Believers' voices may not and cannot be silenced. And their voices can be directed in criticism against the very churches of which they are members. Yet we publish the truth of the Reformed faith as it is maintained in the Reformed Protestant Churches, and we are thankful for the denomination that at present the word of God can sound forth from her pulpits.

And that truth we want the world to hear. We love that truth, and we hope that you do too. Please drop us a line if you are reading and profiting from the content of *Sword and Shield*. You can drop us a line too if you disagree with the content of the magazine. We publish friend and foe. Only let the foe know that we will respond on the pages of our paper.

The January issue of *Sword and Shield* is dedicated

to the annual meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing. Each year in October the annual meeting is held. The highlight of the meeting is a keynote address. This year it was given by Rev. Tyler Ophoff on the vital subject of the antithesis. His speech forms the basis of the guest editorial this month. At the meeting there were also comments from the board president. The board president is Mr. Joel Langerak, and he gave the audience a reminder of the truth for which *Sword and Shield* contends and its reason for existence in the world. Rev. Luke Bomers closed the meeting by speaking about Jehoshaphat's strengthening of the kingdom of Judah against Israel, the false church of the northern ten tribes. His speech was a short, biblical exposition of the truth for which Reverend Ophoff contended in his speech. These speeches are included in the issue as well.

At the annual meeting the results of the board elections were announced. Retiring from the board are Aaron Cleveland, Jason Cleveland, and Dan Schipper. Elected in their places were Brent Snippe, Bob Vermeer, and Lee Wiltjer. We thank the retiring board members for their years of service to the cause of *Sword and Shield*. And we welcome aboard the newly elected men.

Rounding out the issue are a message from the board of Reformed Believers Publishing titled "Renewed unto Strength as Eagles" by Mr. Eddie Ophoff and the *Running Footmen* contribution from Mr. Craig Ferguson titled "Faith, Not Fear."

We pray that you will be edified by the articles and contributions and that they warm your hearts, inform your minds, lift your spirits, and give you courage through the precious truth of Jesus Christ.

"In glory exult, ye saints of the Lord; with songs in the night high praises accord; go forth in His service and strong in His might to conquer all evil and stand for the right."¹

—NJL

1 No. 407:3, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian *Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1927; rev. ed. 1995).



RENEWED UNTO STRENGTH AS EAGLES

The board of Reformed Believers Publishing gives thanks to God for his preservation of *Sword and Shield* magazine in the past year. Month after month the Lord has given zeal for the truth and astounding insights to the editor and writers, as well as the fortitude necessary to fight against the false doctrines promoted in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). These lies come from manifold sources—by her ministers in their preaching, by lectures, decisions of her assemblies, and they are even propagated through “family letters” that are intended for broader distribution. The magazine continues to fight against these lies, old and new, wherever they are found.

The board stands in full support of the magazine’s polemical nature and gives praise to God for the believers who have joined themselves to this cause: the writers, who have spent many hours in labor for the kingdom to set forth the truth and expose the lie; the editor, with his seemingly endless capabilities; the copy editors, to whom so many talents have been given to aid in this worthy cause; and all who have contributed behind the scenes to enable the magazine to continue to exist.

The magazine forges forward as a believer’s magazine, which is evidenced by its array of writers, membership, supporters, and the fact that the magazine is without ecclesiastical oversight. We pray to Jehovah for his continuing care in the year that is ahead, for the Lord alone is the fountain of all good.

The ability for believers to express their joy in the truth and to read article after article that confesses the greatness of God and the abasement of man in salvation is a refreshing blast of fresh air after years of confusion and smog. That salvation is not dependent on his own working and doing is a comfort to the child of God, for the believer who knows his sinful nature and sinfulness knows that there is nothing he can offer to God. The magazine continues to warn the children of God of dangers and to equip them with the knowledge and tools to war against the proper works of the devil, the false church and those who try to defend her, and our own totally depraved natures, which rise up to try to condemn us.

It has been several years now since the first triumvirate editorship of *The Standard Bearer* silenced the truth and allowed to win the day the lie that if man is to be saved, there is that which man must do, which gave birth to *Sword and Shield* magazine. The path of this false doctrine is nearly impossible to recap in its history, with all its twists and turns in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Yet through its many variations and in all its forms, the doing of man for his salvation and the experience of his salvation is alive and well in the PRC today. The insightful articles in *Sword and Shield* are a tremendous encouragement to the believer who wearies in the battle. Like an eagle renewed in its youth, the believer is strengthened to continue the battle in the warfare for the name of Jesus Christ.

God be praised for the battle cry of the free forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ that resounds from this magazine, a cry that is hated and reviled by those who insist on their repentance as a means or way unto forgiveness. God be praised for the battle cry of Jesus Christ as a complete and perfect savior over against the teaching that Jesus Christ is not enough for salvation and that something else must be done by man. God be praised for the battle cry that there is nothing that man must do or can do to save himself, for there is one way man is saved, Jesus Christ. Not in the way of obedience but in the way of Jesus Christ for salvation and the experience of salvation is the sound of *Sword and Shield* magazine by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

29. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.
30. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:
31. But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isa. 40:29–31)

—Eddie Ophoff, on behalf of the board
of Reformed Believers Publishing

CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

Welcome to the fifth annual association meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing. It is an absolute delight to see everyone here this evening. It is exhilarating to know that you gather here to give witness to the truth, that you are here for the support and the confession of that truth through the Reformed Believers Publishing media of *Sword and Shield*. It is an absolute delight and an encouragement to the editor, the regular writers, and the board of Reformed Believers Publishing.

Let us open with a word of prayer.

Prayer

Our gracious God and heavenly Father, who is so great a God as our God? Thou hast revealed to all creatures that there is none else besides thee. Thou art Jehovah, and there is none like unto thee. We confess that all thy works are perfect, and all thy ways are equity and judgment. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path is in the great deep. Thy footsteps are not known. Thou art the Lord of truth and art without iniquity. Thy word, O God, is truth. Thy word is as no other, for it is a word of power, light, and glory.

We thank thee, O God, for this meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing and for the many believers gathered here and those who are listening online in support of our cause of defending and proclaiming thy word of truth through the printed page. Lord, as we are engaged in the cause of thy truth, we intreat thee for thy blessing upon all our labors and endeavors. Let the beauty of thy face be upon us and establish thou the work of our hands. We beseech thee, unite us in thy truth and that we may be faithful witnesses, that we may confess thy truth and name before men, though all men deny thee. Work in us thy Spirit so that we may speak and write with boldness in a world where such boldness is slandered.

We thank thee that thou hast continued to uphold and strengthen our editor and other writers. Give them courage, wisdom, and all that they stand in need of to write for the cause of the truth. Preserve them in truth. We pray that thou wilt use our publication of *Sword and Shield* as a powerful instrument to set forth, defend, and spread the gospel of pure grace and that it may give a sharp, antithetical witness against all error that defiles thy truth. Our prayer, O God, is that our magazine will build



Joel Langerak

up the elect in the truth and in their faith wherever thou dost hold them in thy care.

Send forth thy Spirit that he may give breath to our churches and to the believers represented here and in every land, so that they may give a witness to the truth without fear and weakness, that they may proclaim Christ in all his wonder, grace, power, and glory as the only way to the Father and of his perfect sacrifice for sinners. Give them thy Spirit so that the whole of their lives are testimonies of gratitude to God for his goodness.

Lord, all around us we hear the footsteps of thy coming. As thou hast spoken, upon the earth there are pestilences and diseases, and there are violent storms, turbulent seas, and roaring waves that cause massive destruction. Among the nations there are wars, rumors of war, distress, and perplexity. And there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Send forth those signs with increased frequency and intensity, so that as men look upon these things their hearts fail them for fear.

Thou hast said to thy children, “When these signs begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draws nigh.” Preserve us and our children, O God, until that day, until that great and notable day of the Lord.

Lord, bless our gathering and fellowship tonight. Be with our speakers, so that the words that they speak may be a great encouragement and a delight to thy people and to thy honor and glory. Lord, keep us from evil and

pardon all our iniquities. Purge us, O Lord, of all our sins.

We ask all of this for Jesus' sake.
Amen.

Thanksgiving and Praise

1. All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell,
Come ye before Him and rejoice.
2. Know that the Lord is God indeed;
Without our aid He did us make;
We are His flock, He doth us feed,
And for His sheep He doth us take.
4. Because the Lord our God is good,
His mercy is forever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.¹

One Sound

The meeting of Reformed Believers Publishing tonight is a wonder and testament to God's faithfulness and sure promises. Our gathering is also a testimony to you and to the world that our witness of the truth and the war that we have waged on the pages of *Sword and Shield* was a righteous cause. It was Jehovah's cause for the recovery and proclamation of his gospel-truth in a new denomination, for the glory of his name, and for his love of the elect. All that was God's work. It was God's reformation, and it was a vital reformation for the office of all believers.

Nearly five years ago God called up a new army of believers and placed it on the front line of the battle for the truth. Authority was given to those believers by Christ himself because he had placed his Spirit in them. Christ gave those believers the right and liberty to confess his name before men, to take up the pen in a new magazine for this cause, to publish his truth, and to wage war against those who defile that truth. That new army was to contend with its own denomination—the Protestant Reformed Churches—because she was trampling on the office of all believers and smothering believers' right and liberty to confess the name of Christ before men. And the denomination became pervaded with the theology of man and his activities and the denial of God's absolute sovereignty in salvation, by embracing the lies of faith as man's doing to receive blessings of God and of prerequisite obedience as the necessary way for the believer to experience fellowship with God.

The Protestant Reformed denomination was once a beautiful bride of Christ who boldly preached and

antithetically maintained the doctrines of particular, sovereign, and free grace; salvation by faith alone; and the unconditional covenant. Now the denomination manifests herself to be an enemy of that gospel. She assaults and denies the truth that God justifies the ungodly and declares that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do! She hates the truth of salvation by faith alone! She pollutes the glorious truth that salvation consists in the free remission of sins for Christ's sake alone and sneers with derision at the believer's forgiveness of sins without repentance. The Protestant Reformed denomination openly mocks the truth of faith as a bond to Christ—the real and living union—from whom proceeds all the benefits of salvation. Instead, she boasts that faith is man's act, not God's act. For the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), Christ's work is not enough for salvation, so she attributes to man and his obedience a place and function in his salvation. And the PRC charges the gospel with being antinomian and plunges her people under bondage to the law. At every point of doctrine, the PRC robs believers of their full assurance of salvation by faith alone and instead professes that good works are not to be slighted in assuring one of his justification. By the PRC's false doctrine, she adds to the perfect work of Christ, strips God of his sovereignty and glory, and steals from the wonderwork of the Holy Spirit.

The PRC is treacherous and an adversary of the gospel; therefore, she is our enemy. We must remain entrenched in warfare with her and her false doctrines. We must be battle-hardened and remain unflinching in our witness of the truth, never dulling or blunting the sharp edges of the truth to please the ears and will of man. Heeding the words of Romans 16, we must mark false teachers who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the truth. We will name them and cut down their false doctrine. And when a false teacher arises in our own midst, we will withstand him to the face. We cannot allow wolves to creep in unawares to ravage and devour the flock of Jesus Christ. We must remain steadfast in our purpose and contend against all adversaries of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must not heed those with itching ears, who desire and call for a different sound. We must resist the cacophony of opposition and revel in the howls and slander that the gospel is one-sided and antinomian. We must sound forth the truth in the face of fierce opposition—though churches, preachers, magistrates, and the edicts of princes be against us or the devil himself seeks to overthrow this righteous cause.

When *Sword and Shield* arrived on the battlefield, it did so with an explosive and unmistakable sound. It was a

¹ No. 268:1–2, and 4, in *The Psalter*.

sound that had not been heard for a very long time. However, the sound was not new nor the product of modern invention. It was the same distinctive sound that has resonated in the hearts of God's people throughout the history of the church. The pages of *Sword and Shield* are filled with the sound that is both sharp and unmistakable, ringing with the clarity of the truth that has been echoed through the ages.

It is the sound of Jesus Christ, who for our salvation came down from heaven, was manifested in the flesh, and dwelt under the curse his whole life to hallow God's name and to live in perfect love for him. Jesus, who knew no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, in our stead took upon himself the condemnation of God's righteous judgment. It is the sound of Jesus, who became obedient unto the death of the cross, where in his human nature he bore the full weight of God's wrath and curse, so that he cried out from the pit of hell, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" On that accursed tree, Christ drank the full cup of God's wrath to its bitter dregs until Christ shouted, "It is finished," declaring that nothing more is required for our justification and that our salvation is secure in him alone. It is the triumphant sound of our risen Lord, who now sits at the right hand of power and has all things in subjection under his feet—where he proclaims absolute victory, that the battle is won, that our fight is over, and that the gates of hell cannot prevail against us.

It is the gospel-sound of free justification by grace alone through faith alone in the redemption of Christ alone. It is the sound of our living union with our savior, Jesus Christ, who imputed to us all his merits and so many holy works, which he has done for us. It is the sound of Jesus, our righteousness, that there is nothing we must do for our salvation. It is the lovely sound that those who possess Jesus Christ through faith alone receive all things and have complete salvation in him. Therefore, it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in us. It is the comforting sound that being justified by faith alone, God's elect have all blessedness, happiness, forgiveness, hope, and peace.

Throughout all history, in every war for the truth and in every reformation of the church of Christ, that sound has rung forth and remains constant and unmistakable. It was the vivid sound of the prophecies of old; it was the sound of a lone voice crying in the wilderness of Judea; it was the same gospel-sound accompanied by a host of heavenly angels; it was the sound of fierce battle against the opponent Pelagius. It was the same sound of the triumphant voices of martyrs crying out from the crackling fires of persecution; it was the thunderous sound ushered in by the hammering on a church door in Wittenberg the Ninety-five Theses, which reverberated through five hundred years of history; it was the bold, distinctive sound

that echoed forth from the pulpit of St. Pierre Cathedral in Geneva. It was the sound preached in the hidden fields near Ulrum, the Netherlands, in 1834; it was the same sound of a reformation one hundred years ago with a courageous defense of the truth of salvation and the defiant condemnation of the lies of common grace and the well-meant offer.

In 2024 the sound you hear on the pages of *Sword and Shield* is the same gospel-melody that stirred the hearts of the reformers and their congregations. It is a sound that is in complete harmony with the glorious symphony of scripture and the grand truths of the Reformed confessions. It is a sound that may not be confused with the grating noise of man and his activity or his part in the covenant, nor the dissonant clatter of a false gospel that mixes grace and works, nor any man-first theology. Rather, it is the beautiful sound of free grace—grace that flows not from human efforts or merit but of the pure love and mercy of our heavenly Father. When one reads *Sword and Shield*, there is no need to ask, how does that sound strike your Reformed ears? With every article, meditation, and instructive and defensive word, *Sword and Shield* carries the notes of God's sovereign, particular, and pure grace. It is the voice of Christ himself, speaking words of free salvation, comfort, and peace to his elect people.

The association of Reformed Believers Publishing, together with the editors, regular writers, contributors, and supporters, must insist that that same sound continues to ring forth on every page of *Sword and Shield*. Whether you hear sounds of a trumpet blast from Zion's walls, the clashing battle sounds of iron and steel, the victorious battle cry of faith, or the comforting and peaceful words of a shepherd, the sound of our magazine must always be the same. It must remain the clear, distinctive, and unmistakably Reformed truth that gives all honor and glory to God to the utter abasement of man.

Sword and Shield is the familiar and lovely voice of the almighty Shepherd, whose people know him because his word communes with his own Spirit in their hearts. It is the sound of his voice, calling his people out of utter darkness and into his marvelous light. The voice of Christ, speaking comfortably to Jerusalem and crying unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from his hand double for all her sins. Only his voice frees the conscience of guilt and shame, brings comfort to the weary, peace to the troubled, and assurance to the anxious soul. Only his voice makes the hearts of believers leap for joy and rejoice in their salvation, regardless of the cost.

And so after you run to the mailbox to get the next issue of *Sword and Shield*, and as you read or meditate on the words printed in our magazine, remember that you are not hearing the musings and fables of men. But you are hearing

the voice of Christ himself, calling you to rest in his finished work, to take comfort in his sure promises, and to have peace in the knowledge that you are his, now and forever.

Stand fast in that truth!

Stand fast in Christ's righteous cause!

Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!

May God be pleased to use our magazine to send forth that distinct, victorious sound that it may continue to echo through the generations, drawing Christ's children to himself, until the day when we will hear his voice, not in part but in full, when he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet and the voice of an archangel, and angels shall gather together all God's elect from the four winds, from the uttermost parts of the earth to

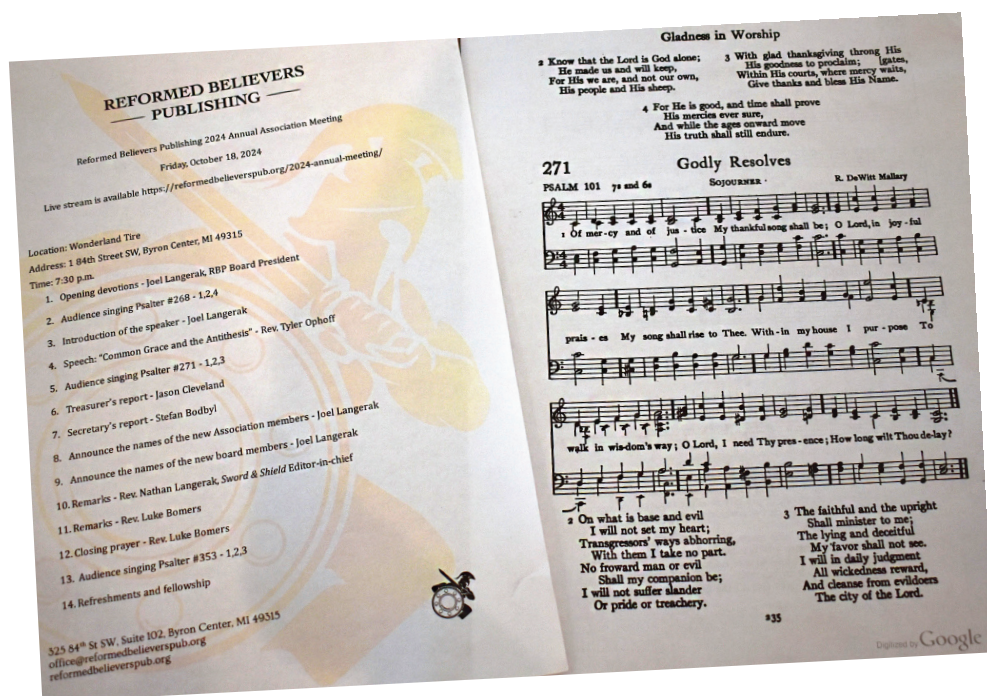
the uttermost parts of heaven into his eternal presence to dwell with him forever.

Thank you.

Introduction of the Keynote Speaker

The keynote speech this evening is titled "The Antithesis and Common Grace." The speaker was ordained into the ministry of the word and sacraments in 2023 in the Reformed Protestant Churches. He is serving his pastorate at First Reformed Protestant Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. He is also the regular writer of the rubric *Understanding the Times in Sword and Shield*.

Join me in welcoming Rev. Tyler Ophoff.



THE ANTITHESIS AND COMMON GRACE

Introduction

The subject of this speech is “The Antithesis and Common Grace.” The topic is a massive one, with a wide range of material and potential applications. To keep us on track this evening, I intend to limit myself to the doctrines of the covenant and the antithesis and the false doctrine of common grace as it relates to the antithesis. Much has been said about the false theory of common grace, which the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) adopted in 1924. Ink has been spilled on this topic over the course of the last one hundred years. Thorough examinations of the theory and critiques on the basis of scripture and the Reformed confessions have been presented to refute common grace. But I am not interested in merely recycling what has been said already. There will be some history regarding 1924, but this speech is not a history lesson. There will be some restatement of the positive developments of the truth that came out of the controversy of 1924, but neither is this speech a class on the controversy of 1924.

My reason for choosing this topic is that the struggle that came to a head in 1924 is instructive for us. Our forefathers had to face the question of the covenant and the antithesis as it stood over against common grace. The development of the covenant as friendship and fellowship stood over against the theory of common grace, which theory was the ground that the church may have fellowship with the world of darkness. Common grace stood as the CRC’s unspoken ground for amalgamation with the world. Rev. Herman Hoeksema prophesied at the time that if the CRC adopted common grace, there would be a flood of worldliness in the church. His prophecy was true. If there is some good in man, whereby he can do the good before the sight of God, then the church may also desire and seek fellowship with the world, and such fellowship is not only acceptable but also ought to be celebrated and encouraged by the church.

There are two antithetical principles that exist in the world. They are not compatible. They cannot coexist. They cannot be harmonized or synthesized with one another. But in the world they are warring principles. These principles form the separation that God places between believers and the church and the world of the ungodly and unbelieving.



Rev. Tyler Ophoff

We are not here to celebrate 1924. Tonight is a sad, mournful remembering of the days gone by when faith was bright and there was a love of the truth. We mourn the sad state of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), who has so thoroughly rejected the truth that was developed in 1924. As in the days of the judges, a generation arose that knew not the Lord or his mighty works, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. The PRC has rejected the truth of the covenant, which was her glorious heritage. She did so at the very point of man’s experience and enjoyment of the covenant. She did so at the point of justification by faith alone, the heart of the gospel. The PRC was a beautiful woman, who has become a cankerous, used, old hag. God is finished with her. And all that remains is the crumbled rubble and smoking ruins of where she once stood. She has forgotten God and his truth. She has persecuted and cast out those who live holily and rebuke her for her errors. She has become an enemy of God and Jesus Christ. She has become the world. Our prayer this evening is that if there are God’s people in the bondage of the devil and dwelling within the synagogue of Satan, God will cut a hole in the net for them and deliver them by his mighty hand and outstretched arm into the rest of Canaan, the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

And yet from the view of God’s particular goodness to Israel, this evening is a cause for celebration—a celebration and remembrance of God’s everlasting, covenant faithfulness toward his people. The battle belongs to the Lord. And the captain of the salvation of his people rides

forth conquering all his and our enemies. We see in the history of the church such tremendous victories that God has given through immense struggle and controversy. And that is cause for celebration and hope for the future. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. The victory is already ours in Jesus Christ by faith alone. Reformed Believers Publishing and *Sword and Shield* carry out that warfare in the believer's office of prophet, priest, and king, assured of a certain victory and that the truth will always prevail. The word of the Lord endures forever and his truth to all generations.

Historical Context

Leading up to the adoption of common grace in 1924 was the Janssen case. It is important to frame 1924 in the lens of that case because of the leftover animosity regarding the case's result toward Rev. Henry Danhof and Rev. Herman Hoeksema. Dr. Ralph Janssen was the professor of Old Testament history at Calvin Theological Seminary. He was a higher critic of scripture, and he grounded his higher criticism in the theory of common grace. He established his rejection of miracles in common grace. For the professor the miracle of the water from the rock did not consist in water being created by God to provide for Israel's thirst. Rather, Moses and Israel learned how to get water from rocks by studying the surrounding nations and their advances in science due to God's operation of common grace. Moses learned how to strike a rock at the right place in order for water to flow out. The professor justified his position of miracles on the basis of common grace. He was simply applying the theory of common grace to exegesis and the interpretation of scripture. The professor was condemned by the CRC in 1922 for his higher critical view, but the leaven of common grace still festered in the denomination. His supporters remained in the churches, infuriated by the professor's condemnation; and as fierce proponents of Kuyperian common grace, they became fierce opponents of Hoeksema and Danhof.¹

Not long after Synod 1922, a pamphlet titled *Not Anabaptist but Reformed* was penned by Reverend Hoeksema and Reverend Danhof in response to a pamphlet by Jan Karel Van Baalen titled *The Denial of Common Grace: Reformed or Anabaptistic*. In 1923 *Sin and Grace* was written by Hoeksema and Danhof in defense of particular and sovereign grace. Both pamphlets that were written

by Hoeksema and Danhof were published and distributed as pamphlets because the Christian Reformed paper *The Banner* had closed off its magazine to Hoeksema and Danhof. The pen that controlled the magazine was then entirely in the hands of those who were panting after the false theory of common grace. The reason given for closing the magazine to Hoeksema and Danhof was that no one wanted the magazine to be filled with articles and discourses about common grace. That same censorship was performed years later by the PRC and the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) and *The Standard Bearer* against the defenders of the covenant of grace, and thus was born Reformed Believers Publishing. And the same blistering criticism that had been leveled against the RFPA at its inception was leveled against Reformed Believers Publishing at its inception: "This movement is revolutionary and can result in nothing but evil for the agitators and for those against whom the agitation is launched."²

In 1924, against the sound, scriptural, and Reformed conception of particular, sovereign grace presented by Reverend Hoeksema, Reverend Danhof, and Rev. George Ophoff, the Christian Reformed Church adopted the three points of common grace. The points are as follows:

Concerning the first point, with regard to the favorable disposition of God toward mankind in general, and not only to the elect...it is determined that besides the saving grace of God, shown only to the elect unto eternal life, there is a certain kind of favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general...

With respect to the second point concerning the restraint of sin in the life of individuals and society, Synod declares that...there is such a restraint of sin...

Concerning the third point, in regard to the doing of so-called civil good by the unregenerate, Synod declares...that the unregenerate, though unable to do any saving good are able to do civil good...³

First, there is a general or common grace of God toward the reprobate. Second, by this general grace, there is a restraint of sin in the world. Third, by this general grace natural man is able to do good things in society. The

1 Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *Sin and Grace*, ed. Herman Hanko, trans. Cornelius Hanko (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2003), xvi.

2 Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, "For the Sake of Justice and Truth," trans. Marvin Kamps, in Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn: God, Grace, and Covenant*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015), 279.

3 *Acts of Synod 1924 of the Christian Reformed Church Held from 18 June to 8 July 1924 in Kalamazoo, MI USA*, trans. Henry J. De Mots, ed. John Knight (Grand Rapids, MI: Archives of the Christian Reformed Church, 2000), 145–46, 1924acts_et.pdf.

three points can be summarized this way: natural man is not that bad, but he actually has some good in him.

Not long after Synod 1924, the Protestant Christian Reformed Church was formed, and in 1926 the Protestant Reformed Churches were born.

The Idea of the Covenant

To understand, know, and love the antithesis, one must understand, know, and love the covenant.

“The doctrine of the covenant...is almost exclusively a plant out of Reformed soil.”⁴ The true covenant conception was formed almost exclusively by the Reformed church. The original idea of the covenant was understood as a bargain or pact, but through the controversy in 1924, the idea of the covenant was properly developed to be a relationship of friendship and fellowship. The essential idea of the covenant is that God’s people are his friend-servants, and his friends have the one, only true God as their friend-sovereign. The covenant is not a cold, abstract doctrine, but it is a warm, intimate relationship that explains all God’s dealings with his people.

The covenant rests in the holy Trinity. God is a covenant God. He is a covenant God and a living God. Within his own divine being as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, he lives an infinitely blessed, divine life of love and intimate communion. He is not a lonely being, but he is the perfect family. The three persons are all partakers of the entire divine being, yet the persons differ from one another in their own individual properties. The oneness of the divine being is a perfect harmony of life and love between the three persons of the Trinity. That divine life is the basis of the covenant relationship between God and his people.

God eternally took counsel within himself. “I am a covenant God, and I will reveal my own covenant life. I will reveal my own covenant life in Jesus Christ and those in Jesus Christ. I will take up my chosen people unto myself, and they shall be my friends. I will send Jesus Christ to the cross. I will pay for the sins of my people. I will impute to them the very righteousness of God in the flesh. I will reconcile them unto me, who by their own sins have alienated themselves from my covenant life. I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” God willed that covenant for his sake and for his glory.

Only in that relationship of fellowship and friendship with God in Jesus Christ does the elect sinner have rest. And in Jesus Christ alone, the elect sinner has fellowship and friendship with God. That is the covenant life God has bestowed graciously. Christ’s blood was the confirmation of the new covenant. Life in the covenant and the

blessings of the covenant—namely, regeneration, calling, conversion, faith, justification, sanctification, and preservation—are particular. As members of the corporation of Jesus Christ, the elect child of God must receive all the blessings of the covenant. The God of your salvation is known, enjoyed, and experienced intimately as your covenant God in Christ. God’s friend is of God, through God, and to God. The elect child of God therefore shows forth God’s praises as one who has been called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light.

God realizes his covenant in the world according to his eternal counsel of election and reprobation. God created man as an organic creature in an organic relationship to the entire world. The regenerate and the unregenerate are inseparable as they exist organically in the world. The elect kernel and reprobate husk are bound together organically. The realization of the covenant follows that organic line in the world: one living from the principle of regeneration and the other from the principle of the root sin of Adam.

The elect and reprobate live in the same world. Yet each live out of two antithetical principles in this world. The elect, whom God has laid hold on and made his friends, live out of the principle of regeneration. That covenant relationship of friendship with God then governs every other relationship of the elect child of God. In every sphere of the believer’s life, his inclinations, will, desires, thoughts, words, and deeds all arise out of the root of regeneration. The reprobate, being cast out in hatred and only ever perishing in the world, live out of the damning principle of sin. With the development of sin in the world in its various connections and relationships, the principles of sin and grace are unfolded by God and lived out by the individual elect children of God and reprobate men according to the nature of each age, time, place, and circumstance.

When Adam, our legal head, sinned, the whole human race fell in him. In Adam, our organic head, the whole human race only ever can sin and develop that root sin of Adam. Man takes God’s good gifts, and man only ever uses and develops God’s good gifts for more sin. The gifts themselves are never grace to the reprobate man, even though he may have many of them. Neither are those good gifts of God to the elect any indication of God’s favorable disposition. The righteous and the unrighteous receive the same rain and sunshine. The reprobate, however, do not become better by these gifts, but they become even worse and more godless. Those good gifts of God are never grace to the reprobate. God only ever works death and destruction for the reprobate.

⁴ Henry Danhof, “The Idea of the Covenant of Grace,” trans. David J. Engelsma, in Danhof and Hoeksema, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, 21.

The Antithesis

Life in the world at times appears so similar for the elect and the reprobate. The elect and reprobate breathe the same air, eat the same foods, speak the same languages, drive cars, own homes, get married, and use God's good gifts in creation. Their lives in the world together appear quite common; yet on account of their different spiritual relationships to God, God creates an absolute antithesis where he forms the separation between his elect and the world of the ungodly. The antithesis finds its roots in election and reprobation.

The question that must be asked is, why was the doctrine of the covenant developed positively as friendship and fellowship with the living God in Christ? In 1924 Hoeksema and Danhof were forced to develop the positive side of the covenant by developing the antithesis, which is the negative side of the covenant. The doctrine of the covenant was not developed in a vacuum. The reason for the development of the doctrine of the covenant is that the men in 1924 saw the influence that the false doctrine of common grace had upon the church. They saw the rejection of the antithesis in common grace, which gave the ground for the church and the world to be friends with one another and to have fellowship with one another. If there is some good in man, some natural glimmers of light whereby he can do good in the sight of God by an operation of common grace, then the church certainly may seek out such fellowship. In fact, such seeking of fellowship is to be commended and celebrated by the church.

What is the antithesis? My definition of the antithesis is as follows: the antithesis is the real, spiritual separation of the covenant friends of God in Christ from the world of darkness, arising from the principle of regeneration, according to election, with the result being inevitable warfare and conflict between the elect and reprobate for all time and history.

Antithesis is a theological term. The word itself never occurs in scripture, yet the antithesis is a scriptural and confessional doctrine. I am going to take a moment to demonstrate from scripture and the Reformed confessions the doctrine of the antithesis and then work through my definition of the antithesis that I just gave and prove it.

I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:15)

Israel then shall dwell in safety alone. (Deut. 33:28)

I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. (Ps. 101:3)

Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? (Ps. 139:21)

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3)

He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. (Matt. 12:30)

In the verses below the ground and reason for the separation is explicitly stated as the living reality of the covenant of God and his elect people in Christ. Being in covenant with God, the calling comes to the elect to separate from darkness, unrighteousness, idols, and the unclean thing.

14. Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

15. And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

16. And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. (2 Cor. 6:14–17)

11. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

12. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

13. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. (Eph. 5:11–13)

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. (James 4:4)

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

All of these passages listed—and more could be given, including the entire history of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament—teach a spiritual separation from darkness and enmity, a hatred of wickedness, a rejection of unrighteousness, standing against God's enemies as God's covenant friends, and having no fellowship with the works of darkness.

The Reformed confessions and minor creeds are explicit as well.

It is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to *separate* themselves from all those who do not belong to the church. (Belgic Confession 28, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 61, emphasis added)

Belgic Confession article 29, speaking of the marks of Christians, says,

When they have received Jesus Christ the only Savior, they *avoid* sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 63, emphasis added)

Belgic Confession article 34 speaks of baptism,

by which we are received into the church of God and *separated* from all other people and strange religions, that we may wholly belong to him whose ensign and banner we bear. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 68, emphasis added)

Lord's Day 27 asks, "Are infants to be baptized?" Because infants are also included in the covenant, the Catechism answers,

Yes...they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church, and be *distinguished* [or separated] from the children of unbelievers. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 111, emphasis added)

And the third paragraph of the Form for the Administration of Baptism states that our part in the covenant is "that we *forsake* the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 258, emphasis added).

The antithesis is first a spiritual separation. The antithesis is spiritual in nature. However, such a spiritual separation can and often does take a physical form. Believers do not send their children to just any Christian school, but together believers start their own school to teach their children the doctrine of the word of God as they believe it. The Christian school is really born out of the covenant and the antithesis, and the content of the education is governed by the covenant and the antithesis.

Yet it is not that we remove ourselves from the organic connection that we have in the world. We are in the world but not of it. The antithesis is world-fight, not world-flight. The charge leveled by proponents of common grace against Reverend Hoeksema and Reverend

Danhof was that they were Anabaptists. It was a false and spurious charge. The Anabaptists were world-flightists. They attempted to physically withdraw from society and the ungodly world. The Anabaptists denied, among other things, the necessity of infant baptism and the legitimacy of the government. At root, they were extremists, revolutionaries, and rebels. The charge that was hurled by the CRC at the reformers in 1924 amounted to this: in your rejection of common grace and in your teaching of the covenant and the antithesis, you are radical and extreme because you teach that there is no good in the world and that we must not have anything to do with the ungodly world. The charge was effectively, "You are extremists and radicals." It was patently false because to be covenantal and antithetical is to be Reformed and scriptural, not Anabaptist.

Within the organic connection of the elect church and the reprobate world, God's regenerating Spirit creates and maintains an absolute antithesis between the two warring parties: those of God's party and those who stand against God. God's particular, sovereign grace distinguishes among men and makes that separation between objects of his grace and objects of his wrath. This organic connection to the world yet spiritual separation from the world brings inevitable conflict. The race of Adam is like a house divided against itself. One rises up against the other: brother against brother, mother and father against children, children against parents, and spouses against each other. There is ever-increasing warfare against sin, one's own house, state and society, business, culture, entertainment, and in every sphere of the believer's life. Humanity as an organism looks at the regenerated believer as a cancer that must be excised out of the body. The world is not passive toward Christ, the truth, and the church; but with all its powers and abilities in each time and circumstance as God sovereignly directs, the world seeks to eradicate such friends of God.

There is in that conflict the cross of your salvation. Jesus Christ in his organic relationship, his appointed time and place decreed by God, warred against iniquity. And the world, according to God's determinate counsel, delivered him up to the cross to squeeze him out of the earth. The world hated Christ and in all its powers worked to destroy him. But at the cross, through the instrumentality of wicked men and the deep way of death and resurrection, God perfectly accomplished the salvation of all his own. Christ opened the new and everlasting way to the Father. Christ led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. And he poured out his Spirit to always dwell in his church.

That separation and warfare is ultimately of God. The warfare is between God, the holy, righteous one, and

Satan, the liar and deceiver, that old serpent. The battle lines run through the world of the children of men. And God attacks Satan and the works of darkness in man and through man. God did so in *the* man, Jesus Christ. And God does so by the regenerated Spirit of Christ in the new dispensation. And in the warfare that God carries out and prosecutes in the earth, he never grows weary, suffers setbacks, or deviates. That the warfare is of God answers the question about how the antithesis is carried out in the lives of believers. It is not about what you want or think is right, but it is about what God says in his word and what God says is right.

The antithesis is an aspect of the covenant. As God's friends, elect believers are of God, through God, and to God. As such, they cannot be the friends of God's enemies, the unregenerate and unbelieving. But in the world God's friends, having fellowship with the triune God in Jesus Christ, also have fellowship with God's people. They are therefore the friends of God's friends. Being God's friend, the believer takes his place in the world with a reverent fear and trust in God, cleaving unto Jesus Christ alone as the one who conquered sin, death, the grave, and hell and vanquished all his foes; and the believer runs his course, fighting the battle of faith. His sole cause is the cause of the gospel, and for that gospel he contends earnestly.

The covenant is fellowship and friendship. The covenant put negatively is the antithesis. If the covenant is intimate fellowship, the antithesis is separation and no fellowship. The word *fellowship* is the key. The believer still lives in the world. He has to work with his ungodly neighbor. He has to buy groceries from an unregenerate businessman. He might have to interact with his ungodly family members. But is he going out for drinks after work with them? Is he inviting them over for a fun night? Of course not! The church, living out of the spiritual principle of regeneration, cannot have harmony, concord, and agreement with the world that lives from the principle of sin. The believer's entire life rises from the root of regeneration in every sphere. One who wills to be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. The believer is the friend of God, and by virtue of that, he is an enemy of the whole ungodly world and the kingdom of darkness. And being God's friend, the believer has no fellowship with those who show themselves to be ungodly by their confessions and walks. Fellowship simply does not exist between the two. They have nothing whatsoever in common.

The calling then comes to be separate, for in reality you are a people separated unto God in Christ. The antithesis is first a doctrine and principle, and then flowing from that comes the calling. Because of the very reality of the antithesis that God places, God's people will inevitably live antithetically according to that calling.

What do you say to the one who does not? Do you maintain an unholy silence? excuse that behavior? Place the doctrines of the covenant and antithesis before him. Do you believe the doctrine of the antithesis? More importantly, do you believe the doctrine of the covenant? Do you believe the word of God and the Reformed confessions? There is a spiritual reality, and if you do not live according to it, what does that say about you? You show me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are. The believer is manifested in this life as a child of God by his confession and his antithetical walk. The believer is a pilgrim and stranger in this world. He is not friends with the world.

What is meant by no fellowship? Negatively, it does not mean shunning. The word "shun" is found in 2 Timothy 2:16: "Shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness." Literally, the word means to stand up and turn yourself around. The word "avoid" can also properly be translated as "shun." Romans 16:17: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." About the false teacher, who babbles about the law or vomits forth another gospel, which is no gospel, the word of God says simply to shun them and their doctrine. That is the doctrine of Professor Engelsma and all who teach prerequisite repentance. Stand up and turn your face from them. Do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they turn around and rend you.

Shunning is different than having no fellowship. They are not the same. In this spiritual warfare of the antithesis, no fellowship does not mean shunning. The two are not synonymous. It can mean that in the case of the false teacher. But if God gives opportunity and an open door to bring the gospel and the word sharply and antithetically, then you rush toward the conflict, "having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). No one is saying that you may not talk with someone. What I am saying is that you better not get together to break bread and drink wine with your unbelieving family or friends while Christ is left outside. The content of all visiting must be God's truth.

To have no fellowship means that there is no communion that exists between the two—between light and darkness, Christ and Belial, righteousness and unrighteousness. Communion is eating and drinking together. Communion is having delight in one another. Can the

light have communion, delight, and joy in darkness? Not at all because no agreement and concord exist between those two spiritual principles, but rather there is only conflict.

A man can be all about the antithesis until it comes to his family. A loved one manifests himself as an enemy of God, and a man can make all sorts of excuses. “He is a good person. I have known him my whole life. He really is not so bad. I know his parents. My kid played baseball with him.” No man can be friend of God and a friend of the world. The two principles of sin and grace do not and cannot exist together, but they are absolutely antithetical.

The gospel of grace makes a distinction according to God’s decree of election and reprobation. The gospel cuts and exposes men. The gospel manifests them because it is a discerning and judging voice in the church that justifies faith and condemns unbelief. And unbelief cannot stand the gospel and hates it. And then you will know too, when that time comes with family and friends, that any more visits or meetings are born only of the flesh. God speaks in the circumstances of your life and says, “Now you must let them go.” Matthew 10:36–39 rings true:

36. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.
37. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.
39. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

This view that I have explained of the antithesis, warfare, and separation characterizes the history of the church and explains all things. This view explains and gives meaning to all of history. The antithesis is really a world-and-life-view. The antithesis reaches all the way back to God’s eternal decree of election and reprobation and his purpose for all things. The antithesis has spanned all of history, beginning with the promise of the covenant in Genesis 3:15. God promised enmity, hostility, hatred, and separation. He carries it out in the earth. The antithesis will climax in the great tribulation and the murder of the church and her servants, and the antithesis will carry right into eternity when the righteous judge shall come down on the clouds of heaven, forever destroying his enemies and bringing his friends with him into eternal glory in the new heavens and earth. The scriptural truths of the covenant and the antithesis bring comfort to God’s people in the face of persecution and give courage to those who seek to live an antithetical life.

Denied by Common Grace

The doctrines of the covenant and the antithesis are denied by the false theory of common grace. In fact, common grace obliterates the absolute antithesis that God has placed between his people and the ungodly world. Common grace teaches, at its root, that there is some good in man. If there is some good in man, then that is the ground for joining with the world, having fellowship with the world, and seeking out the world.

In 1924 our spiritual forefathers were battling mainly the desire of the CRC to amalgamate with the world in culture, entertainment, arts, and sciences. The evil fruit of common grace can be seen on the pages of *The Banner* yet today. The Christian Reformed Church’s magazine is replete with talk of redeeming the culture for Christ, reviews of movies and entertainment, and nonsense and worldly garbage.

Does the separation and antithesis that God places cut through more than the ungodly world and the church? Does it also cut through the true church and what calls herself church? Yes!

There are many who call themselves church. The PRC calls herself church. Those who are members of the PRC call themselves believers. But when their faith, which believes all that God reveals in his word, is put to the test, do they believe in Christ? They do not, though they boast of him in words. They have rejected the gospel. They have not the love of the truth that they should believe a lie.

The PRC, as an institution and as seen widely in the speech of her members, simply cannot condemn anyone anymore. In joining hands with those who do not confess the truth, her unstated ground is common grace. The language goes like this, “Even though the United Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and other denominations might have some things wrong, there is still some good in them.” If those churches have a lot of things right and only a few things wrong, that is tantamount to saying that there is some good in them. Common grace stands as the unstated ground of the ecumenical movement in nominal Christianity, Reformed churches, and the PRC. The PRC in that way has denied 1924.

If the PRC still believed in particular, saving, efficacious, and irresistible grace and the reality of the unconditional covenant, then she also would reject and hate God’s enemies and engage in warfare against them. Protestant Reformed churches would not be commending their blessings when members leave. The denomination would not be holding hands with the *Bekennende Evangelisch-Reformierte Gemeinde* (BERG) or the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA). Unity Protestant Reformed Church would not be having a speaker

come from another denomination to speak to the youth. Unity would not have adopted a “Pray for Me” prayer campaign that comes from some non-denominational ministry leader. Reverend Spronk would not be encouraging Protestant Reformed members to attend the colloquium doctum of Rodney Kleyn in the United Reformed Churches. If the PRC believed the truths of particular grace and the covenant and the antithesis, the PRC would be carrying out warfare against God’s enemies, and she is not. The PRC is the world. The PRC is the false church. She and her members are the enemies of God.

What is true of the PRC is true also of the man who seeks fellowship and friendship with God’s enemies. A man says about an enemy of God, “He might reject the truth. He may have cast out God’s servants. He might not believe exactly like I do. He doesn’t like it when we talk about the truth and when I bring that truth to him sharply. But I can still see him. We can get together. We can have a good time. We can have drinks and open presents.” A man might confess with his mouth the doctrine of particular grace, but by his walk he might as well believe in common grace. The unstated ground of such fellowship is common grace because in that unbelieving family member or friend, there really is something good and desirable. There is some good in that man or woman

who rejected the gospel. The result is a total breakdown of the antithesis.

I warn the Reformed Protestant Churches: if you reject the antithesis as it is preached in our churches and slander it as radical or extreme, then you will also reject the covenant. And God will spew the churches out of his mouth, for they are neither hot nor cold. There will be nothing but a flood of worldliness and carnality because in effect you will have adopted common grace.

And I offer this encouragement: preach the covenant and preach the antithesis in all its force without dithering or backsliding. Defend that preaching. Uphold that preaching. Demand that preaching. You will not win many friends. In fact, the foundations likely only will get smaller. As such, it is a sign that the end draws nigh and that Christ is coming quickly. God placed the separation; he did so by his particular, electing grace. And he made you enemies of the ungodly world, which has no grace. All things are common in the world except grace. And all that is not of Christ will be burned with a fervent heat in the day of judgment. And in that day God will reveal before the whole rational, moral world his righteous verdict: “You are my friend for Christ’s sake. I have justified you in him. And you shall dwell with me in perfect covenant fellowship eternally.”

—TDO

Godly Resolves

Thank you, Reverend Ophoff, for that stirring, instructive, and penetrating speech tonight.

Let us continue with the program by singing all the stanzas of 271—Godly Resolves—a fitting psalter number for the occasion and the speech.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Of mercy and of justice
My thankful song shall be;
O Lord, in joyful praises
My song shall rise to Thee.
Within my house I purpose
To walk in wisdom’s way;
O Lord, I need Thy presence;
How long wilt Thou delay? | Shall my companion be;
I will not suffer slander
Or pride or treachery. |
| 2. On what is base and evil
I will not set my heart;
Transgressors’ ways abhorring,
With them I take no part.
No froward man or evil | 3. The faithful and the upright
Shall minister to me;
The lying and deceitful
My favor shall not see.
I will in daily judgment
All wickedness reward,
And cleanse from evildoers
The city of the Lord. ¹ |

¹ No. 271:1–3, in *The Psalter*.

ANNUAL TREASURER'S REPORT

Once again we give thanks to God for financially providing for Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) for another year. It has been a fruitful year, mailing thirteen more issues of *Sword and Shield* free of charge to the reader. Depending on the number of pages per issue, the average cost of typesetting, printing, and mailing each issue is about \$5,000.

The primary source of income to support the publishing and mailing of *Sword and Shield* comes from gifts. The other sources of income are from a few people who pay for subscriptions to the magazine and from the sales of bound volumes of *Sword and Shield*. The total income for the last fiscal year was \$85,637.08. Of that amount \$79,568.76 came from donations. The printing and typesetting costs for the last fiscal year amounted to \$65,039.33. As noted in the secretary's report, this past year the board approved spending over \$12,000 to update the RBP website to make it more searchable. Website design, postage, and administrative expenses totaled \$21,148.28, leaving RBP with a fiscal-year deficit of \$4,007.66. The current balance on hand is \$28,017.85, which is enough to publish and mail about four or five more issues.

As the retiring treasurer, this is the last time that it is my duty to ask you to consider giving to this worthy



Jason Cleveland

cause. I pass that responsibility over to Doug Mingerink, who is the new treasurer. So please consider RBP in your year-end giving. Donations can be made online at the website of Reformed Believers Publishing (<https://reformedbelieverspub.org/donations/donation-form/>), and donations can be mailed to the RBP office at 325 84th St SW, Suite 102, Byron Center, MI 49315.

Thank you.



ANNUAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

God has preserved Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP) for another year. The past year for RBP has been unremarkable in the eyes of men. The eyes of faith see a wonderwork of God as he has used *Sword and Shield* for the edification of his people. Month to month, God has given *Sword and Shield* as a defense against the lies of Satan. The truth of justification by grace alone through faith alone to the glory of God alone has continued to be proclaimed by Reformed believers on the pages of *Sword and Shield*. We give thanks to our ever-faithful Father for preserving us in spirit and in truth.

The past year of publishing has been marked by meditations that have been balms to the soul, editorials that have exposed the lie of salvation by man's working, and polemical articles by Reformed men and women that have caused the enemies of God's truth to gnash their teeth. The readers of *Sword and Shield* will note that the numerous voices of the magazine are, in fact, one united voice. God has orchestrated a beautiful harmony of thanksgiving that rises to his glory alone. We thank the authors who have boldly taken pen to paper and used God's gift of writing to the profit of many. We pray that God continues to provide Spirit-dwelt writers and Christ-centered articles.

God has used *Sword and Shield* to edify a broad audience. Currently a little more than 1,800 copies of the magazine are mailed each month. In addition to the United States, there are men and women who receive *Sword and Shield* in eight other countries.

To enhance the experience of the online user, the board has contracted Northbound Studio to complete upgrades to our website. The approximate cost of the project is around \$12,000. The first goal of this project is to add search functionality to the website. This upgrade will allow readers to search a term or topic and receive a filtered response of appropriate articles. Another benefit of this user-friendly database of articles is search engine optimization. Our hope is that this benefit will help promote the Reformed faith and get *Sword and Shield* into more hands. The second goal of this project is to have each new issue of *Sword and Shield* uploaded to the website on the first day of each month. Our hope is that this project will be completed by November 2024.

God provides for the publication of *Sword and Shield* in many ways. God has provided financially through many



Stefan Bodbyl

different donors in many different amounts. We thank God for continuing to give supporters of RBP the ability to donate in such a way that the magazine remains free of charge to the reader. Please consider donating to RBP if you have found the magazine to be edifying. God has also provided by giving to the association a board of godly men who are willing to serve in the month-to-month affairs of publishing *Sword and Shield*. We thank God for leading the board in these matters. We also thank all the men who have been nominated for their willingness to serve on the board of RBP. We thank Dan Schipper, Jason Cleveland, and Aaron Cleveland for their years of service on the board. God has given *Sword and Shield* two incredible copy editors, Evelyn Langerak and Ally Ophoff. Their numerous hours of labor have eased the burden of the authors as the copy editors polished thoughts and grammar. By God's grace Rev. Nathan Langerak has served the past year as a faithful editor in chief. We look forward to another year of his leadership and insightful editorials. We also are grateful to God for Tami Cleveland, who has taken care of much of the office work behind the scenes and has helped the magazine to go out without a hitch. Tami recently transitioned most of her responsibilities to Paula Roberts. We are thankful for these women's service to the cause of RBP. God's providential hand is visible in every area of the publication of *Sword and Shield*. We pray that God continues to bless the work of Reformed Believers Publishing and that he preserves in our midst the truth of salvation by Christ alone.

EDITOR'S REMARKS

I want to say that seeing everyone here tonight is a great source of encouragement to the writers, to the board, and to me as the editor in chief of *Sword and Shield*. Many, many hours not only of thinking but also of writing go into every issue of *Sword and Shield*. Sometimes in one's weaker moments one can ask, "Does it even matter? Does it do any good?" And tonight is a rebuke of that thinking. To see the support that is very evident in those who have traveled to come here, in those who have gathered here tonight to support *Sword and Shield* is a source of immense encouragement.

Sword and Shield was born as a fighting magazine. It was born, therefore, as an antithetical paper. *Sword and Shield* fought within the denomination of the Protestant Reformed Churches until it was cast out of the denomination. And *Sword and Shield* still maintains that right to criticize denominations, decisions, acts, and mindsets that exist in denominations and in the Reformed Protestant Churches. *Sword and Shield* is not a denominational rag; and if it ever becomes one, put it quickly out of its misery. It is that fighting, independent spirit that we hope continues for another year in the publication of *Sword and Shield*.

Regarding that publication of *Sword and Shield*, I want to personally express my thanks to the board. Both the



Rev. Nathan Langerak

present and former boards have been absolutely unflinching in the publication of *Sword and Shield*. It is a controversial magazine. And the boards have given and give evidence that they love the truth in their unflinching support of *Sword and Shield*. So our prayer is then that God will continue to give his grace to the writers, contributors, the editor, the copy editors, and the board, so that we publish *Sword and Shield* again faithfully for another year.

Thank you.



STRENGTHENED AGAINST ISRAEL

What has been said tonight by various men brings to mind a verse on which I preached not too long ago. This verse has to do with a king of Judah, Jehoshaphat. It is the very first verse that records the beginning of Jehoshaphat's reign: "And Jehoshaphat his [Asa's] son reigned in his stead." Now to summarize the very beginning of Jehoshaphat's reign, scripture says, "And [he] strengthened himself against Israel" (2 Chron. 17:1).

It is very easy when reading an Old Testament, historical narrative to just keep buzzing along. Do not just buzz along. The word of God that Jehoshaphat "strengthened himself against Israel" is very important.

Jehoshaphat strengthened himself *against Israel*—Israel, whom God brought up out of Egypt, marched through the Red Sea, carried through the desert, and to whom God gave an inheritance in the land of Canaan; Israel to whom God in generations past gave judges and his gracious rule of Jesus Christ through David and Solomon; Israel to whom God gave oracles, his law, and many mighty works; Israel who came out of the loins of Abraham and was blood relation to Judah. It was now *Israel* against whom Jehoshaphat strengthened himself.

There were tremendous enemies around Judah. Just prior to Jehoshaphat's reign, a massive Ethiopian host had come up against Judah. There was Syria. And there were Ammon and Moab and Edom that could form a mighty coalition and fight against Judah.

But Judah had one enemy—one enemy in the mind of all that kingdom. The enemy was Israel. Judah was not worried about the other nations, but Judah concerned herself with Israel.

And Jehoshaphat turned Judah into a well-oiled war machine. He created a military juggernaut, an army of one million men *against Israel*. Jehoshaphat stockpiled troops, fortified cities, and set up garrisons throughout the entire land. He made storehouses for victuals and munitions *against Israel*. He was not concerned with Ethiopia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Syria; but he was concerned with Israel.

The statement that Jehoshaphat strengthened himself against Israel stood in stark contrast with the rest of his reign, for he continually sought affinity with Israel. Not many years after Jehoshaphat had strengthened himself against Israel, he married off his son to Ahab's daughter. Then Jehoshaphat joined himself in battle with Ahab. Then



Rev. Luke Bomers

Jehoshaphat joined himself in an economic alliance with Ahab's son Ahaziah. And then Jehoshaphat joined himself in battle yet again with another of Ahab's sons, Jehoram.

That act wherein Jehoshaphat strengthened himself against Israel did not arise out of his own flesh. That was not his own desire, but that was Jesus Christ's gracious rule in Judah. When Christ set up Jehoshaphat to reign in Judah, Christ strengthened that kingdom against Israel, so that when the people of Judah awoke in the morning and saw all the garrisons, the strongholds being built, and the massive army, their first thought was, "We are at war *against Israel*."

That was Christ.

You can tell Christ's handiwork in the world. You can see him work when he strengthens his church against Israel. You can see the handiwork of Jesus Christ in the written word on the pages of *Sword and Shield*. There you can see Christ's gracious rule in his church, strengthening his kingdom against Israel.

The text gives encouragement, for it tells you something about the origin of this magazine. The origin was not man; it was Jesus Christ—Christ's gracious rule in his church, strengthening his church against Israel.

The text also gives warning against those who would shame and sow discord against that strengthening of Christ's kingdom against Israel. It is a warning. "You are shaming the marvelous, mighty, gracious work of Jesus Christ, who makes the church very aware of who her enemy is, so that she wakes up in the morning and says, 'I am at war.'"

Imagine some peon coming to Jehoshaphat and saying, “I do not like what you are doing. I think you could spend your time and your money in a better way. There are better things that you could be doing with the kingdom and with its energy.”

Be warned! Christ always strengthens his kingdom *against Israel*.

The text gives focus too. It gives focus to the writers (I am speaking personally), to the board, and to the association represented here. What is that focus? What is the focus of the writing of *Sword and Shield*? The focus is against Israel. And so that there is no confusion regarding who Israel is, Israel is the Protestant Reformed Churches.

There was a lot said tonight against the Protestant Reformed Churches. Rejoice in that. Rejoice in that. That is Christ’s coming to strengthen his church against Israel.

I conclude my remarks.

Let us pray.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, seeing thou hast determined a kingdom wherein thou wilt be all in all—so that when Christ (who has made an end of thy wrath against the sins of all thy covenant people, who has given his life as a ransom price, whom thou hast raised from the dead and highly exalted and given the reins of this word) brings all in submission to thee, then that kingdom comes—Lord,

let thy name be all in all. Let thy name and thy truth and thy cause be made glorious and weighty in the world.

And since thou hast chosen the church to be the pillar and ground of the truth, since thou hast chosen thy church to be thy kingdom, wherein thou art all in all, preserve and protect thy church.

Lord, bless too the work of *Sword and Shield* and continue to use it as a means to make thy name weighty and glorious in the world. If the magazine ever does anything other than that, break it, for to thee alone belongs all glory, honor, and praise. If there be those who seek to undermine and disrupt that work, break them, for thou art glorious as the only good and ever blessed God. Thou art glorious, O Lord, in thy sovereign election and sovereign reprobation. Thou art glorious, O Lord, in using all those in whom thou hast no pleasure for the service of thy covenant and of thy church and of thy kingdom. Thou art glorious when thou dost lift up thy people into the everlasting kingdom and when thou dost break the nations with a rod of iron, for thou art God. Prosper the magazine that it gives clear defense of thy truth and exposes the lie and reproves it.

Lord, we thank thee for this evening, and we pray that all that was done in sin be forgiven in the blood of Jesus Christ.

May we go with thy blessing.

Hear us in Jesus’ name.

Amen.





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

FAITH, NOT FEAR

Imagine that my experience of God’s mighty hand among us is very similar to the experiences of many readers of *Sword and Shield*.

Like many in the Reformed Protestant Churches, I am of a generation far removed from the beginnings and touchstone battles of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). The year 1924 was almost seventy years before my birth; the schism of 1953, forty years. There is a PRC that I learned about from history books. According to that history the PRC appeared to be a very bold and convicted federation of churches with sound doctrine, rich and lively and beautifully true. I loved what I read in those history books about the PRC and her doctrine, but the ministers who taught me throughout my life were at most lukewarm on Rev. Herman Hoeksema and his theology, and many of them were intent on distancing the current Protestant Reformed theology from its warring heritage. That always seemed odd.

Looking back now, that was a clear indication of the unbelief that dominated in the PRC. If those ministers had convictions, they were that those ministers did not want to be seen in the same way as they viewed Hoeksema (unless, of course, it was a redefined Hoeksema). One professor, upon seeing me in the Hoeksema portion of the library in the Protestant Reformed seminary, quipped, “You know, HH wasn’t right about everything.” That same professor expressed shock at the way Hoeksema and his contemporaries wrote: “I couldn’t get away with any of that today.”

Hearing that as a young member from the farthest reaches of the denomination—the Canadian hinterland—well, those statements stayed with me. I was bewildered. What had I heard? Was it right? Why did the sentiment seem so foreign? Was it just a matter of a man’s opinion, to be discarded without much thought? The cognitive dissonance was dizzying—proud of the PRC’s doctrinal superiority but embarrassed of her heritage and founding? embarrassed of God’s work to preserve and keep the denomination and her heritage? At the time, I did not see clearly what was going on, and I wondered if I was missing some secret knowledge that had put me in the dark. There was obviously significant disagreement on the warfare of the church, evidenced by the enormous gap and apparent animosity between Professor Engelsma and the

other professors, and the ministers who came after them attested to that fact, not to mention the menagerie of different opinions in the pew. Every man was saying something different; the harmony of the church had become a cacophony of opposing spirits and masters.

Now, of course, that state of affairs is increasingly simple to understand and demonstrate. The ministers, elders, and members of the PRC hated the doctrine of Reverend Hoeksema, in particular the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in salvation as summarized in the creeds. There was no conviction among them because they did not believe that doctrine to be true.

But why could I not see it then? I was no loudmouth rebel in the PRC. I sat dutifully in my place in the pew. I memorized everything I needed to memorize, even the intricate patterns of paying lip service to the PRC’s Reformed heritage while undermining everything for which the PRC’s church fathers had fought. As the foundations of the PRC began to crumble, I joined the droves that flocked to support all the right men, and I parroted the same lines we would all rehearse so many times later about the wisdom of the broader assemblies and the purity of doctrine in the PRC—two arguments that were foolish, wishful thinking.

Having been delivered by the mighty hand and outstretched arm of God, I now spend Sundays gaping at the wonders of the celestial city into which I have been brought, like a country bumpkin visiting the capital of an empire. But instead of seeing a mere city of stone and mortar, the living gospel declares to me, “Behold your God!” And I behold him, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, mercy and truth kissing each other! Sunday after Sunday, my ignorance is exposed to my shame, but that shame is swallowed up by the gospel’s declarations to me about my God. Each Sabbath my king displays his glory, and the risen Christ stands before me, his foot upon the head of his enemies, his resurrection life filling my heart, the breath of his love pouring out of the scriptures, and his glorious light casting away every shadow of turning, every shadow of sin.

Under the illumination of that light, Jehovah’s heralds have carried out of God’s treasure house many wonders, new and old, and set them on display. The truth has sought out the lie like a guided missile, taking the

contest onto a battlefield where all pretenses are exposed, all lies are revealed, and all excuses are destroyed. So also, we have had restored to us a right perception, and we are made aware of so many snares of our past. We also have seen principles of the resurrection life of Christ restored to us, so that we are transformed in our daily lives.

I can see now that, swallowed whole by the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches, I was a wretched creature entangled in snares, snares that held me like layered webs, so that even if I could have struggled free of one snare, another was waiting for me. The first snare blinded me, so that my ability to perceive beyond the surface of so many dazzling doctrines was impaired. In that web a barb was hidden, one that pumped a poison into my soul and left me with questions in every place where I should have had confident, clear, Reformed answers. With very few exceptions, I found no help in the pulpit or in the elders' bench. Conviction of the truth had departed long ago, leaving those places dusty and cold.

When I think back to life in the PRC, I perceive now that I and many others were tormented creatures for a number of years. What else can you call that life in the PRC for children of God but *torment*? To know by a number of signs and strangenesses that something is horribly wrong but to lack the perception to truly see and understand? To wonder why the gospel and confessions continually speak of freedom and life in Jesus, but the preached word was a stranger to such freedom and life? To know that the gospel gave the strength to battle and to fight in our daily struggles but constantly to be directed toward our own devices, doing, and cleverness so that the awaited blessings could be given? To have Christ preached as only the possibility and not as a power? To have the contortions of reprobate minds argue one into a faux assurance (self-righteousness)?

That subtle, subversive, and blinding poison, which had been driven deep into my being, was fear. Unbelieving fear.

Fear Versus Faith

The word of the false gospel of the PRC (and of most other so-called Reformed churches, whom the PRC really ought to join) is not faith alone but fear alone, terror alone. Be afraid—fear death. Be terrified that the promises of God are not really true. Fear that Christ did not speak truly when he declared that he had finished all of our salvation. Fear what man thinks of you and will say about you to others. Fear what men can do to you if you dare to pull against the bars of man-centered doctrine, if you even dare to look outside the cage to the truth that stands outside the camp, bearing the reproach of all. Fear

that it is wrong to be certain of a finished work of God. Fear that the gospel will make you careless and profane. Fear that the gospel really is about repenting enough to satisfy God's standard of forgiveness, and fear what that will mean for you and your salvation. If you doubt the words of powerful men, fear that you will never have God's approval without first having theirs. Fear what will become of your family if you actually maintain the truth as truth. Fear what will become of your standing and life in this world if you maintain the truth with all the boldness that the truth demands. Fear that Christ is not enough.

Let us not be mistaken: there *is* such a thing as a faithful fear. The Old Testament and the Psalms especially are replete with references to such fear. That fear is a right fearing of Jehovah, godly reverence and trust in him, a worshipful regard for his perfections and holiness. That fear is awe that is born of faith, and positively it is the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of knowledge. It is the fear of Moses, who removed his sandals at the command of God and humbled himself before Israel's omnipotent deliverer, for Moses stood upon holy ground. That fear is no confidence in the weakness of the flesh, but that fear is a despising of the strength of the flesh and a resting in the strength of God, who works in his people both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

The matter of fear is set before us in the Heidelberg Catechism. The fear that is of faith is fear that in principle is a keeping of the first commandment.

Q. 94. What doth God enjoin in the first commandment?

A. That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry, sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, invocation of saints, or any other creatures; and learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in Him alone, with humility and patience submit to Him; expect all good things from Him only; love, fear, and glorify Him with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to His will. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 124–25)

Zacharias Ursinus, in commenting on this question and answer, makes a distinction between what he terms “servile fear” (unbelief) and “filial fear” (faith):

Servile fear, such as the slave has for his master, which consists in fleeing punishment without faith and without a desire and purpose of changing the life, being accompanied with despair, flight and separation from God—such a servile fear differs greatly from that which is filial.

1. Filial fear arises from confidence and love to God; that which is servile arises from a knowledge and conviction of sin, and from a sense of the judgment and displeasure of God. 2. Filial fear does not turn away from God, but hates sin above every thing else, and fears to offend God: servile fear is a flight and hatred, not of sin, but of punishment and of the divine judgment, and so of God himself. 3. Filial fear is connected with the certainty of salvation and of eternal life: servile fear is a fear and expectation of eternal condemnation and rejection of God, and is great in proportion to the doubt and despair which it entertains of the grace and mercy of God. This is the fear of devils and wicked men, and is the commencement of eternal death, which the ungodly experience already in this life. “I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid.” “The devils believe and tremble.” (Gen. 3:10. James 2:19)¹

The two principles could not be more opposed to each other. Both are far-reaching. Both are all-consuming. Both determine the mind and the direction. One is all zeal and conviction, commitment at all earthly costs, and assured joy in a certain outcome. The other is all lukewarm, quivering cowardice; caged desperation; and tragic despair. The one principle is the confident pilgrimage of the stranger, the other is the clutching and grasping of the native of this world. Faith rests in God and his promises to his elect in Jesus Christ. Faith is a principle for all of life. Fear is also a principle around which an existence can be formed (not really a life), but it is a principle that brings ruin and despair, tormenting with visions of safety and happiness but bringing only cages and shackles. That is because such fear is, at its root, unbelief.

Fear: Portent of the End

- 25. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;
- 26. Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. (Luke 21:25–26)

I would like to highlight what Ursinus pointed out about the fear of unbelief in connection with James 2:19. That fear is not to be considered lightly nor its significance diminished because that fear is a devilish thing, a

thing born out of hell. That a man should have knowledge about the most high God but not a knowledge of faith makes that man just like a devil—he knows, and he trembles. And this fear is a principle of his whole life. He lives his whole life looking over his shoulder, a certain awareness of his end looming over all he does. He is like the one described in Hebrews 10:27, who is characterized by “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” Fear fills his eyes, and loss hovers over all his lovelies.

Further, that fear comes rushing to the forefront in times of trial, when a man’s claims and life are put to the test, and he is exposed before all.

We should not be surprised to see just how prevalent this terror is, for it has stood at the forefront of each controversy during the short history of the Reformed Protestant denomination. From her very beginning, and recently again in the matter of repentance and forgiveness, unbelieving fear has insisted that there must be something more required than the precious blood of Christ. In the matter of legalistic wranglings about the preaching and the sacraments—as well as the shameful worship of exclusive psalmody—the fearful, unbelieving man craved a system of grace that can be manipulated by man, a grace that is found in physical things, a grace that is available and is ineffectual until man exercises faith or obeys, and a keepable law to maintain himself in God’s favor, attempting to cooperate with God to receive the blessings of faith. And in the matter of the school and the antithesis, the unbelieving man scorned the love of Christ in the body and devised for himself a clever way to “live” apart from that body, being wise in his own conceits, depending on himself and his earthly wisdom to lead him through, clutching to himself his earthly ties as his one true and great love that he will never render to the care of Jehovah God.

As our savior teaches us, this terror is a sign of the end times. Where will it be evident that men’s hearts are failing them for fear? in the world? Yes, of course. The great and mighty in the earth will cry out for the hills to fall upon them, seeking to hide from the judgment of God. That said, they were long ago consumed by that fear, and there is nothing strange about seeing it in the world. They eat and drink and are merry, for tomorrow they die.

But where could this effect be seen more clearly than in the church? In that company a man by his talk may align himself with Christ’s cause for a time, but when trial comes, his false faith shrinks in fear, and he runs and

¹ Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Company, 1888), 514.

hides himself in the rickety pavilion of his own imaginations. When exhorted to rest in Christ and look to him, that man answers that such comfort is all well and good when the danger is abstract and theoretical, but not when his earthly ties are truly on the line. No, then he forsakes the church, murders her with absurd charges and slanders, gathers his flesh around himself, and departs for the greener pasture of his own backyard or the cold company of like-minded men. He despairs of God's promises in Christ and goes his own way.

Fellow footmen, do not be surprised when people all around us, and even a great many of our number, fall prey to such fear, for these are the last days. These people are dominated by fear because they love this present world and its dainties. Remember the prophecy of Simeon, and count it to be no great strangeness:

34. Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
35. (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. (Luke 2:34–35)

By means of this exposure, God drives out of the church those identified in Jude 12–13:

12. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;
13. Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Faith: Boldness in the Last Days

27. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.
28. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. (Luke 21:27–28)

Look up!

It is not as though according to his flesh the believer has no sense of fear or of that which could cause him to fear. On the contrary, the believer is especially sensitive to the weakness and insecurity of his flesh. In the weakness of his flesh, he is prone to fear and to doubt the promises of God. Oh, yes, the believer knows fear all too well. How often the psalmist cried out when surrounded by his

innumerable foes! And the bold Peter took his eyes off his Lord and sunk into the consuming waters!

But, even in all the things that shall come in the last days, the believer is identified by scripture as one whose seed remains in him, and thus he abides in Christ. The believer's life is not here below; indeed, as to the life here below and the things of this life and present world, the believer is dead, crucified with Christ. "Ye are dead," says Paul in Colossians 3:3, "and your life is hid with Christ in God."

Remember the resurrection and ascension of Jesus! The battle is already won. What is there to fear? Such was God's comfort to Moses at the burning bush—to Moses, who had seen how his own arm of strength failed to be Israel's deliverance and who was a desolate stranger in the land of Midian; Moses, who was called to march into the very palace that he had by faith forsaken and to pronounce the demands of God to the mighty pharaoh who held Israel in bondage. "Certainly," God told Moses, "I will be with thee" (Ex. 3:12).

Regarding this passage, John Calvin comments as follows:

It is remarkable that God sets his ready help alone against all to overcome every fear, and to take away every scruple; as much as to say, It matters not who Moses is, or what may be his strength, so that God be his leader. In these words we are taught, that he is never regarded by us with due honor, unless when, contented with his assistance alone, we seek for no ground of confidence apart from him; and, although our own weakness may alarm us, think it enough that he is on our side. Hence these celebrated confessions of his saints:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me." (Psalms 23:4.)

Again, "In God have I put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me." (Psalms 56:4.)

Again, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people." (Psalms 3:6.)

Again, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31.)

Therefore, in proportion to our advancement in the faith, when we are exposed to the greatest dangers, do we magnify the power of God, and, exalting ourselves in that, advance boldly against all the world; and this is the ground of firm and unwearied obedience, when the thought that God is with us is deeply rooted in our hearts.²

² John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentary on the Bible*, Exodus 3:12, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/cal/exodus-3.html>.

Again and again scripture shows us the work of the Spirit in the people of Christ to deliver them from the bondage of fear. There are almost too many examples to recount. I encourage the reader to look at 1 Kings 22, where Micaiah, taken out from the dungeon of his wrongful imprisonment, boldly declared the word of the Lord to the God-despising Ahab and his multitude of false prophets. One cannot really understand David's confidence before Goliath if he does not know himself how the Spirit gives true, enduring conviction concerning God and his promises. Indeed, whenever faith shines like the wondrous jewel that it is, it shines in repudiation of fear and doubt and unbelief. Trace the fruits of faith on display in the lives of God's workmanship in Hebrews 11, and you will see how the faith of Christ contrasts again and again with the fears of the flesh.

Over against the terror of unbelief, God declares the certain, soothing word of his promises in Christ. And that word shows its power in the hearts and minds of his people. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). Do the people of God fear from time to time? Indeed, they do, and that fear is of the flesh. But by faith—that is, by that quickening Spirit of Christ that he breathes into his own—they are not consumed by that fear, but they cling to Jesus Christ and all that he has done for them. He is sufficient. He is the victorious king.

So, look up, believer! Be bold and confident in Christ! Stand in the certainty that whatever comes, comes only at his hand, which hand is also the hand of your deliverance and salvation. Dare to be convicted of the truth and to stand daily in that conviction. He will not allow you to

be plucked from his hand, and he has not led you out of Egypt for you to be consumed by hunger and the enemy. Fight and be assured of your victory.

Look up, and you will see Christ marching at the front in the vanguard, his sword raised and flashing in his blessed light, his foes falling before him, no matter their creaturely strength. And beyond, consider the gates of the celestial city, their heads lifted up, obeying the glad summons, the everlasting doors opening the way for the king of all glory!

Your redemption draws nigh!

1. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
2. When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.
3. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.
4. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.
5. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.
6. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD. (Ps. 27:1–6)

—Craig Ferguson



Reformed Believers Publishing
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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 2:5

The word of God speaks of a profound mystery here. It gives to us an insight into the mind of God. Who can know the mind of the Lord? Man cannot even know completely his own mind. He surely cannot know the minds of other men—what they are thinking, what they have purposed, or the motivations behind their words and actions. But here we catch a glimpse of the mind of the Lord. We see the mind of the Lord as he reveals that to us in Jesus Christ. And what a gracious sight we behold! His thoughts to us are thoughts of love.

The mind is the faculty of thinking and planning. Man does what he does deliberately out of his mind. The animal has a mind as well. Yet the animal is no rational and moral creature. The animal with its mind lives out of its instincts. Man with his mind lives out of that mind. The mind is closely related to the will. With the will man chooses what the mind presents to it as good. The mind is in turn informed by the heart. Out of the heart are all the issues of life. The heart is that faculty in which man loves. He lives out of what he loves. What he loves in his heart, he decides with his mind that it is good, and with his will he chooses that which the mind says is good. As such a rational and moral creature, man is the reflection of God, his creator.

And mystery of mysteries, we have laid before us the mind of God. Oh, yes, the apostle says that this mind was in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus, in his incarnation, in all his words and works, and especially in his cross, we see a mind at work. Yet it may not be forgotten that the person of Christ is the person of the Son of God. The mind of Christ is the mind of God. Indeed, it is the mind of the eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity. It is the mind of the one who is God of God and Light of Light; he is coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christ is eternally begotten, not made. In his mind with the Father and the Spirit, Christ planned and determined all things from eternity. He is worthy of all honor and praise. He is God, and he has all the prerogatives of God. The mighty angels cover their faces with their wings before Christ. He is the one who occupies the sapphire throne and by whose command the world was created and is sustained from moment to moment.

And that sapphire throne Christ exchanged for a stable floor. He did not suppose in his mind that his honor as God was a thing to be held onto. Christ looked not on his own things—his glory, honor, and prerogatives. But Christ looked on the things of others—our terrible plight as damnable sinners without God and without hope in the world. He made himself of no reputation. Christ took on himself the form of a servant. He entered the darkness of our night of sin and death. He became a man, and he humbled himself to the bitter and shameful death of the cross. How can we even begin to grasp the love, the grace, and the mercy that filled that beautiful mind, the very mind of God? Christ's thoughts toward us were thoughts of peace. And to establish peace he became nothing for us.

Let that mind be in you. Your mind is as ugly as Christ's mind is beautiful. No, you cannot attain that mind for yourself. He must give it to you. The one with that beautiful mind must lay hold on you. He must change your mind and make it like his mind. Then you begin to live out of that mind and not out of your own selfish mind that seeks only your own things. When you begin to look on the things of others, then that is the work of the mind of Christ in you. And it is beautiful.

—NJL