

A stylized illustration in orange and white. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. A shield is positioned in the lower left, overlapping the sword's hilt. The shield features a circular design with several smaller circles inside. The background is white.

SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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CONTENTS

- 3** **MEDITATION**
REST FOR THE WEARY
Rev. Herman Hoeksema
- 6** **FROM THE EDITOR**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 7** **EDITORIAL**
UNION WITH CHRIST (5):
CALLING
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak
- 14** **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**
THE ANTITHESIS (1): LETTING OUR
REFORMED FATHER SPEAK
Rev. Tyler D. Ophoff
- 21** **OUR DOCTRINE**
SACRIFICES (7): *SAMAK*
Rev. Luke Bomers
- 27** **DRY MORSEL**
THE KNOWLEDGE OF MAN (1):
WALKING WITH GOD IN PARADISE
Rev. Jeremiah Pascual
- 31** **RUNNING FOOTMEN**
VALIANT
Ashley Cleveland
- 35** **CONTRIBUTION**
THE MINOR CONFESSIONS (3):
THE NICENE CREED
Garrett Varner
- 40** **FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



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This meditation is from the pen of the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema and is reprinted from *The Standard Bearer* 1, no. 10 (July 1925).

REST FOR THE WEARY

*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.*
—Matthew 11:28

Toiling!
Do you know by experience the sad and disheartening implication of that word?

Nay, if you would understand its meaning, do not summon before the eyes of your imagination the picture of the daily laborer in the shops, or of the husbandman in his field, who rises early in the morning and returns home in the evening, tired and weary, and longing to forget the burdens of the day in restful sleep. For, however heavy the work may be which he finds awaiting him every morning, and however fatigued his frame may be when the daily task is finished and he lies down to rest, in the evening of every day he returns home in the consciousness that the task is accomplished and that he may forget the struggles of the day.

Rather imagine the man who is groaning under burdens too heavy for human strength to bear. Or think of the man who is laboring at a hopeless task. All the strength of body and mind he exerts to exhaustion. To accomplish the work is the ambition of his life. From early morning till late at night he struggles and strives and ponders and plans. Incessantly he labors with all his might. Yet he fails. And after all his attempts he finds in the end he is farther from the goal than at the beginning. Real toil is to strive with all our strength of body and mind for an end that is never achieved. It is to labor hard and incessantly at a hopeless task that can never be accomplished.

And are you acquainted with the spiritual significance of the word?

It is the spiritual toilers under burdens too heavy for them that the Lord calls in the text.

It is a toiling which in its deepest root is born from the heart's desire to get right with God, to know that we have peace with the Most High and that His favor is with us. The heart, then, somehow realizes that His loving-kindness cannot be enjoyed, and that the objects of His favor we cannot be, except on a basis of a righteousness

that is valid before Him. For He is righteous, we know, and spotlessly holy. It feels, too, that this basis of righteousness and justice cannot be established, except the law be fulfilled and all its demands are perfectly satisfied. And we begin at the task to gain the desired peace in the way of accomplishing our own satisfaction of the entire law. But as we labor and toil to fulfill the law of the Lord, we experience that she is a severe mistress. And though we may labor with all our might, anxious to hear from her the sentence that it is enough, repeatedly she flings us back with her terrible, "Cursed is he that doth not abide perfectly in all that is written in me!" And toiling on still, we find that we increase our guilt daily, that the task is a hopeless one, and, groaning under heavier burdens than before we commenced the struggle, we are inclined to abandon the attempt and hang the harps in the willows, still longing, yet despairing.

Are you sin-weary?

Do you find the burden of the law too heavy to bear? Have you toiled with it and groaned under it and been oppressed by it, till you succumbed in grief and despair?

Take, courage, then.

For "the wise and the prudent" do not know this weariness. They care not to be righteous or boast of a righteousness that is a vain thing before the Lord. And never would they acknowledge that the natural man can only increase his sin daily.

Take courage, for the Lord calls you by name: Weary toiler, come unto me!

He will give you rest!

Rest!

Blessed word!

Thrice blessed for the weary and toiling soul!

It is not simply to cease from toil and struggle, it is far more. It is to cease in the consciousness that the task is accomplished, that the work is done, that the end is achieved, and to rejoice in the finished product. It is the

glorious feeling of body and soul that we may enter into and enjoy the fruit of a completed work.

Thus it is naturally.

And thus it is spiritually.

Ah, what a task to be accomplished pressed down upon our weary soul! What mountains of sin and guilt rose up before our consciousness to be removed. Sin in our actual walk, sin with all the members of our body, sin in our thoughts and sin in our deepest heart and in all our planning and desiring, sin in what we did and said and thought and wished and sin in what we did not do and think and say and wish, sin in the present and sin in the past, sin everywhere, as far as the eye could see.

And then, when we penetrated more deeply into this horrible reality of sin, we found that it was not merely a matter for acting but a question of our very being. For out of the heart are the issues of life. And that heart is corrupt, hopelessly corrupt; and from it, as a boiling and bubbling fountain, rise all these actual sins. So that, before we could hope to remove the mountain of our actual guilt, that heart must be cleansed. The corrupt fountain of iniquity must be changed into a clear stream of love.

And searching more deeply still into this awful mystery of sin, we discovered that the deepest source of this foul fountain of iniquity is not even in our individual hearts and lives, but that it is connected with a rushing stream of sin and guilt that leads us, for its source, back into paradise of yore. And we found that it would be of no avail even to attempt to cleanse the fountain of foul sin in our own heart, unless we could first cleanse that deepest and original source of it all.

What a task!

How disheartening to know that there is no life, no peace, no comfort and joy for our troubled soul, unless the task is finished, guilt is blotted out; the stain of sin is removed, the heart is cleansed, the foul fountain of iniquity is changed into a stream of living love! And then, to have struggled and toiled till all our strength was exhausted, and to know that we utterly failed, so utterly that the end of all our toil is greater sin and heavier burdens.

And then to learn that there is rest!

To know that the task is accomplished, that the stream of our guilt is washed away, that we may cease from toiling, in the blessed knowledge that all is finished, that

there is righteousness and sanctification, wisdom and redemption, peace and joy and comfort and eternal life in God's blessed communion.

Comfort, weary toiler, for you.

The task is accomplished.

Accomplished for you.

Rest!

I will give you rest!

He is the Rest-giver because it is He that accomplished the task.

He put His shoulders under our burdens, the burdens of our guilt and sin and condemnation. For the Father gave Him a people from before the foundations of the world, a people whose Savior He was to be, their Head and their Redeemer, and whom He was to bring from the horrible slavery of sin and death into the glorious liberty of the children of God. He, therefore, was to take their place, and to assume their burdens of guilt and sin, to carry them way down into the dark and deep valley of His agony and death, to leave them there forever.

And He did so, according to the will of His Father.

He did put His shoulders under their heavy burdens, under which they would have been crushed into death and hell.

And He was strong, for His Name was Almighty God.

He was able to bear these burdens even unto the accursed tree of the Place of Skulls, to enter with them into the dark abyss of death and hell, to toil and labor with them until He had shaken off the load of guilt and the shackles of death, and, first from Calvary, then soon from Joseph's garden, He might send forth the glad tidings: It is finished!

He accomplished the task.

With Him there is rest.

And the Rest-giver He is, too, because it is He that causes us, by the irresistible operations of His Spirit and grace to enter into His rest.

By nature we would not even seek to enter into that rest. Surely, we may seek rest, but we do not desire His. Rest we seek and imagine to possess in the accomplishment of our own righteousness, which is abominable to Jehovah. But He never forgets His people, neither leaves them alone. Into their hearts and minds He enters by the Spirit of grace. In that heart He knows how to create unrest and worry. He reveals unto them the greatness of their sin, the abomination of their vain righteousness,

He is the Rest-giver because it is He that accomplished the task.

He put His shoulders under our burdens, the burdens of our guilt and sin and condemnation.

their own impotency to fulfill the demands of the law, their proneness to all evil, and the corruption of their heart and mind.

And with unrest He fills the heart, till every last basis of self-confidence is removed, till from the heart the cry is wrung: "O God, be merciful unto me, a sinner!"

And then, when all the wisdom and prudence, all the righteousness of works, all self-conceit and self-confidence to carry our own burdens and remove them is uprooted, and the heart longs for a righteousness that is not its own but God's, He stands forth in all the beauty of His salvation, in all the glory of His power, and says: "Weary toiler, it is finished. The task thou laborest to accomplish is completed. The work is done!"

It was done for you.

Completely finished by Me.

I will give you rest!

Come unto Me!

Blessed summons, when by the gracious call of His Spirit, He makes it resound in our soul!

And blessed soul that obeys that summons and comes!

It is a coming which is the result of Father's drawing. For no one can come unto Him except the Father which sent Him draw him. The drawing is first, and the coming second. The drawing is the cause, and the coming is the result. It is the drawing of that love which is always first, and the coming of faith which relies on that love.

It is a coming which begins when we cast away all our own righteousness and every basis of confidence in self. For we cannot come unto Him with aught of self. Empty and poor and naked, weary and exhausted, as the drowning man who struggled with the tempestuous sea till his strength was gone, thus we must come to Him Who is our all.

It is a coming that continues when we see Jesus as we never see Him with our natural eye, full of grace and glory and life and rest and peace, the fullness of our wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and complete redemption, and when our soul, hungering and thirsting

after righteousness, desires to possess Him above all the treasures and pleasures of the world.

It is a coming by which we draw nearer, when we hear Him address us, as with the natural ear we could never hear, so clearly and distinctly as if He were calling us by name: "Weary toiler, heavily burdened one, cease from toiling at your impossible task. I have finished. Come unto Me and rest!"

It is a coming whereby we know and trust that when He bore the burden of His people's sin, our transgressions and our iniquities were also upon Him, so that we believe His promise and trust for life and death with all our soul in that promise: I will give you rest!

And that promise He fulfills.

He fulfills it when He sheds forth the love of God into our hearts, that love in which there is no fear, and when He gives us the faith by which we shout in joy and redemption: "We, therefore, being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." He fulfills it when, if we would return to the old burdens and the slavery of sin and death, He draws us back unto Himself and assures us, "Your sins are forgiven." He fulfills it, when amid the battle and strife of this present life in the midst of the world, He makes us partakers of the peace that passes all understanding.

And He will fulfill it to the last.

For the final rest is not yet.

There still remains a sabbath for the people of God.

The eternal sabbath.

And the Rest-giver will surely bring that final rest. When all of life is over and all the weary night is past, and the last one of His toiling people shall have been brought into the rest He accomplished, then He shall come again and lead His people into the perfect rest. Then the toiling and groaning creation shall be delivered from the yoke of vanity and corruption and partake of the rest of God's children.

God, through Christ, shall have completed His work.

And into that completed work we shall enter.

God's tabernacle over all!

The rest of eternal joy!

The beginning of the new year has come and gone, and we are well into 2025. With the passing of time and with the vicissitudes that come to us from the Lord as we pass along with time, we experience the Lord's unchanging mercy and faithfulness to his promise. It is the unchanging goodness of God, the sovereignty of his grace in the salvation of his chosen people, and his immutable promise to bring his people to heavenly glory that we celebrate in *Sword and Shield*. The Lord has been faithful to us, and we have a little proof of that in the continued existence of *Sword and Shield*. If the Lord had not been on our side when proud and angry men sought the destruction of our cause, we would have been swallowed up alive. The magazine is committed, and by God's grace will remain committed, to writing and so promoting the God-glorifying truth of the Reformed faith, particularly as the Lord has given us to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before and to see a little farther into the unfathomable reaches of his truth.

Along with that commitment to publish the truth, there is an equally strong commitment to defend the truth and to attack the lie. The truth cannot be long promoted without the defense of the truth and the relentless attack against the lie. God has separated a people to himself from eternity; and with God's calling of his people into his covenant, he has separated them from all that is of the world, the devil, and their flesh. There is an antithesis! Enmity and warfare come with the antithesis. There is no cessation of these hostilities. There can be no détente or rapprochement between the truth and the lie, just as there is no peace between Christ and Belial. And so there are not any quiet relationships and easy getting along between the seed of Christ and the seed of the devil! *Sword and Shield* must play the part that God gave to it at this point in history in the epic and history-long struggle between the truth and the lie.

In that light I note that Reverend Ophoff is beginning a series of articles on the truth of the antithesis in his rubric *Understanding the Times*. We hope that his writing will enlighten the readers on this subject. It is a hated subject. It is a maligned subject. But to the child of God, it is a subject as lovely as God's own revelation of himself as the God who is light and in whom is no darkness at all. The antithesis is simply a part of the revelation of who God is; and when God makes us of his party in the world, then the antithesis also characterizes our whole lives.

For the rest Reverend Bomers continues his informative series on the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Reverend Pascual begins a series on the knowledge of man with an article on walking with God in paradise. Garrett Varner continues his treatment of the minor creeds. The Reformed church is a creedal church, and we have a rich heritage of creeds, as we see in his treatment of the Nicene Creed. Ashley Cleveland fills the *Running Footmen* rubric this month. This rubric is always an exciting part of each issue for me, as it highlights the work of the office of all believer in *Sword and Shield* by the writing of both men and women who love and are valiant for the truth. The editorial this month continues the series on the truth of the elect child of God's union with Christ and thus of all the riches of salvation that become his in that union. Because the subject of the editorial is the saving call and because part of the apostasy of the Protestant Reformed Churches is departure from the truth of the calling taught by Herman Hoeksema, we include for the meditation a comforting exposition of Christ's word of rest given to the weary. Hoeksema did not describe the calling as a work or condition that man must perform. But he described Christ's call as a sovereign call to his elect alone that takes away their weariness and gives them rest.

To God alone be the glory!

—NJL

UNION WITH CHRIST (5): CALLING

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30).

Sharp Contrast

Such are the burden-easing and rest-giving words of our Lord to weary and toiling sinners. All rest is of him and from him. In ourselves there are only burden, labor, and toil. That burden, labor, and toil are the unbearable yoke and bondage of the law and the unbearable burden of guilt. Whosoever is in the law and is under the law cannot have any other experience than that of bondage and a bondage in which there is no rest. There is no rest now, and there is no rest eternally.

Astoundingly, man exists under that bondage and supposes that he is free. Not all who hear the word of the Lord are laboring and heavy laden. Many in his audience have no sense of burden and no realization of toil. Only when the Lord by his grace opens your eyes, ears, and hearts do you begin to see in what peril you stand, and you weary of it all. You stand before the living God unable to be right with him in yourself. And Jesus comes and draws you to himself. He takes away the killing yoke of the law and lifts the crushing burden of guilt. He places on you his yoke—which is easy—and his burden—which is light—and gives rest to your souls.

Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is all of him, and it is none of us. Such is the truth of the calling. For what Jesus did in those verses was to call his own. He did not call all. He called only his own. In that calling he certainly, infallibly, and irresistibly saved his own by his powerful voice. He lifted their burdens, and he gave them rest. “Come to me!” Jesus said. And he made that call resonate in their hearts, and they came to him, drawn by his irresistible summons.

Beautiful!

Gracious!

Saving!

But listen!
Another sound!

It is not enough for salvation that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It is not enough that there is a Jesus. It is not enough that this Jesus was born of a virgin, that this Jesus lived a perfect life, that this Jesus taught and defended the word of God, that this Jesus suffered under the wrath of God in an atoning death, that this Jesus arose with his body from the grave on the third day, that this Jesus is ascended in power at the right hand of God in the heavens. Not enough for salvation.

God must not only have sent Jesus into the world, but I must come and you must come to Jesus. I must become one with him, so that I enjoy his fellowship and share in his salvation. For salvation it is necessary that I come to him. And if I do not come to him, there is no salvation and no enjoyment of the blessings of salvation.¹

Ugly!

Wicked!

Damning!

Such were the words that Rev. Ronald Cammenga (now Professor Cammenga, Emeritus of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches) preached in 2003 on Matthew 11:28. It is difficult to comprehend how a man who claims to be Reformed can get something like that across his lips. That he could preach those words in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he so savaged, indicates that he is not Reformed at all. He is Arminian at heart.

In those statements Cammenga created a disjunction—fatal—between the saving acts of God in Christ and the coming of the sinner to Christ. The sinner by his obedience to the call adds to Christ’s work, which Cammenga said was “not enough” and which must also then be insufficient. He did not teach that the calling proceeds from God’s election. But the coming of the sinner to Christ is the activity that makes all the other saving acts of God worthwhile and effectual. It is “not enough”

¹ Ronald Cammenga, “Jesus’ Call to the Weary,” a preparatory sermon preached in Southwest Protestant Reformed Church on October 12, 2003.

that Jesus was incarnate, died, was raised, and ascended to God's right hand, but we must come to Jesus. Jesus is not a savior, a complete savior, unless and until we come to him.

Sickening!

Clear Departure

Christ saved us at the cross. He saved us with a holy calling too.

But for Cammenga Jesus made salvation a possibility, a possibility only realized when we come to Jesus.

Worse, if that were possible, Cammenga posited the possibility that those who are called do not in fact come and do not in fact enjoy the blessings of salvation. Especially this last statement is important: "If I do not come to him, there is no salvation and no enjoyment of the blessings of salvation."

I doubt highly that if you pressed Cammenga, he would deny that there is election and that the elect are called. But what then was he doing? He was teaching especially that in the daily experience of salvation it is the sinner's coming to Christ that brings with it the enjoyment of the blessings of salvation. I daresay that if you pressed Cammenga, he would say that the elect have salvation, but what the elect do not have

is the *enjoyment* of salvation until they come to Jesus Christ. Perhaps I am being too generous. But the issue here is that for Cammenga there is not an irresistible demand in the decree of election that the elect are called and that by the power of that calling, the elect infallibly come. It seems that for Cammenga everyone in Christ's audience is laboring and heavy laden, and there are some who will obey the call and come to Jesus. But not all are laboring and heavy laden. That is a characteristic of God's elect when God begins to work in them through the calling. For Cammenga the calling is not the fruit of election, so that the call goes out into the world to gather God's elect. It is not inconceivable for Cammenga—as it is for a Reformed man—that the elect who are called would not come. Cammenga conceives of and teaches the possibility that an elect child who is called would not come to Christ and that he would not enjoy his salvation.

If anything should have told everyone who had ears to hear that there was something seriously wrong in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), then it should

have been that sermon with the quotation above at its heart.

Cammenga's sermon was protested to the consistory of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, and the protest eventually went to the September 8, 2004, meeting of Classis East of the PRC. I sat at the deliberations. The delegates were not appalled by the preaching of Reverend Cammenga, and some delegates even demanded more of that kind of preaching in the churches. They had gotten the message, and they liked the message. And make no mistake: the quotation above was the heart of the sermon and is the doctrine that Cammenga intended to communicate as he was preparing his congregation to partake of the Lord's supper the following Sunday. He had crafted the whole sermon to come to the point that what Jesus did for salvation was "not enough," but also you must come! For Cammenga not only election and the cross bring salvation into your possession, but also your act of coming to Christ is necessary to make the cross worthwhile and saving.

"Come to me!" says Christ.
That is not the proclamation of a condition. That is the proclamation of the sovereign Lord, who carries out his counsel of election and draws his people unto himself.

In that sermon Cammenga taught the new Protestant Reformed doctrine of the calling. I say that this doctrine was new because it was a departure from the doctrine of the calling taught by Rev. Herman Hoeksema, Rev. George Ophoff, and others who were the founding ministers of

the PRC. The PRC had her origin in controversy over the doctrine of the calling. The Christian Reformed Church in 1924 with her adoption of the three points of common grace also adopted officially the doctrine of the calling known as the well-meant gospel offer or sometimes simply called the free offer. This doctrine was found in what Hoeksema called in Dutch the little point of the first point. That first point reads as follows:

Concerning the first point, with regard to the favorable disposition of God toward mankind in general, and not only to the elect, Synod declares that according to the Scripture and the confessions 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. This is evidenced by the quoted Scripture passages and from the Canons of Dort II, 5 and III and IV, 8 and 9, which deals with the general offer of the Gospel; whereas the quoted declarations of Reformed writers from the golden age of

Reformed theology, also give evidence that our Reformed fathers from of old have advocated these opinions.²

The Christian Reformed Church slipped the free offer of the gospel into her decision, as though it were common knowledge that there is a general offer of the gospel. In that the Christian Reformed Church showed what she was after—a grace of God that offers salvation to all men who hear the gospel. That was the real prize. There is a favor of God in which he desires the salvation of all men and according to which favor he offers salvation to all men in the gospel. That decision was a corruption of the doctrine of the calling.

Rev. H. Hoeksema and others most vigorously opposed that doctrine. In their opposition they explained clearly the truth of the calling and insisted on a doctrine of the calling governed by election and proceeding from the truth of God's sovereignty. They insisted on a doctrine of the calling that gave all the glory to God, who draws his people to Christ and saves them in Christ. Those men gave no glory to man in the calling, as though the calling of God depends on the response of man. There was nowhere to be found in their doctrine of the calling a disjunction between what God had done—election and the cross—and what man must do yet to receive the blessedness that God had prepared for man. Their view of the calling was that the very election and work of God in Christ demand the calling and the effectual coming of the elect to Christ.

Hoeksema's Doctrine

That the election and work of God in Christ demand the calling and effectual coming of the elect to Christ is what the men who opposed the corrupt doctrine of the calling preached as well, as is clear, for instance, from Hoeksema's exegesis of Matthew 11:28. I remind the reader that he wrote the following in July 1925, so it represents the founding doctrine of the calling in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

I [Jesus] will give you rest!

He is the Rest-giver because it is He that accomplished the task. He put His shoulders under our burdens, the burdens of our guilt and sin and condemnation. For the Father gave Him a people from before the foundations of the world, a people whose Savior He was to be, their Head and their Redeemer, and whom He was to bring from the horrible slavery of sin and death into

the glorious liberty of the children of God. He, therefore, was to take their place, and to assume their burdens of guilt and sin, to carry them way down into the dark and deep valley of His agony and death, to leave them there forever.

And He did so, according to the will of His Father.

He did put His shoulders under their heavy burdens, under which they would have been crushed into death and hell.

And He was strong, for His Name was Almighty God.

He was able to bear these burdens even unto the accursed tree of the Place of Skulls, to enter with them into the dark abyss of death and hell, to toil and labor with them until He had shaken off the load of guilt and the shackles of death, and, first from Calvary, then soon from Joseph's garden, He might send forth the glad tidings: It is finished!

He accomplished the task.

With Him there is rest.

And the Rest-giver He is, too, because it is He that causes us, by the irresistible operations of His Spirit and grace to enter into His rest.

By nature we would not even seek to enter into that rest. Surely, we may seek rest, but we do not desire His. Rest we seek and imagine to possess in the accomplishment of our own righteousness, which is abominable to Jehovah. But He never forgets His people, neither leaves them alone. Into their hearts and minds He enters by the Spirit of grace. In that heart He knows how to create unrest and worry. He reveals unto them the greatness of their sin, the abomination of their vain righteousness, their own impotency to fulfill the demands of the law, their proneness to all evil, and the corruption of their heart and mind...

And with unrest He fills the heart, till every last basis of self-confidence is removed, till from the heart the cry is wrung: "O God, be merciful unto me, a sinner!"

And then, when all the wisdom and prudence, all the righteousness of works, all self-conceit and self-confidence to carry our own burdens and remove them is uprooted, and the heart longs for a righteousness that is not its own but God's, He stands forth in all the beauty of His salvation,

² *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), 146, https://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcnasynod/1924acts_et.pdf.

in all the glory of His power, and says: “Weary toiler, it is finished. The task thou laborest to accomplish is completed. The work is done!”

It was done for you.

Completely finished by Me.

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Come unto Me!

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And blessed soul that obeys that summons and comes!

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It is a coming which begins when we cast away all our own righteousness and every basis of confidence in self. For we cannot come unto Him with aught of self. Empty and poor and naked, weary and exhausted, as the drowning man who struggled with the tempestuous sea till his strength was gone, thus we must come to Him Who is our all.

It is a coming that continues when we see Jesus as we never see Him with our natural eye, full of grace and glory and life and rest and peace, the fullness of our wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and complete redemption, and when our soul, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, desires to possess Him above all the treasures and pleasures of the world.

It is a coming by which we draw nearer, when we hear Him address us, as with the natural ear we could never hear, so clearly and distinctly as if He were calling us by name: “Weary toiler, heavily burdened one, cease from toiling at your impossible task. I have finished. Come unto Me and rest!”

It is a coming whereby we know and trust that when He bore the burden of His people’s sin, our transgressions and our iniquities were also upon Him, so that we believe His promise and trust for life and death with all our soul in that promise: I will give you rest!

And that promise He fulfills.

He fulfills it when He sheds forth the love of

God into our hearts, that love in which there is no fear, and when He gives us the faith by which we shout in joy and redemption: “We, therefore, being justified by faith, have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” He fulfills it when, if we would return to the old burdens and the slavery of sin and death, He draws us back unto Himself and assures us, “Your sins are forgiven.” He fulfills it, when amid the battle and strife of this present life in the midst of the world, He makes us partakers of the peace that passes all understanding.

And He will fulfill it to the last.

For the final rest is not yet.

There still remains a sabbath for the people of God.

The eternal sabbath.

And the Rest-giver will surely bring that final rest. When all of life is over and all the weary night is past, and the last one of His toiling people shall have been brought into the rest He accomplished, then He shall come again and lead His people into the perfect rest. Then the toiling and groaning creation shall be delivered from the yoke of vanity and corruption and partake of the rest of God’s children.³

Oh, how antithetical, how joyful, and how comforting is this doctrine over against the wretched and disturbing Arminianism of Cammenga. There is no rest in his doctrine. There is only what man must do to be saved. God and all his work in Christ are turned into a possibility unless and until man comes to Christ.

Cammenga’s Arminianism

The teaching of Cammenga in his sermon was a total rejection of the doctrine of the calling taught by Hoeksema, and thus it was also a total departure from the doctrine that was the founding doctrine of the PRC. The PRC sold her birthright! And Cammenga has taught this doctrine to a generation or more of Protestant Reformed ministers. His doctrine is a corruption of the truth of the calling and is fundamentally Arminian. His doctrine of the calling is essentially an offer, and it is essentially conditional.

This can be seen if we distill the Arminian doctrine of the well-meant gospel offer. What is that doctrine at its heart? Often people get wrapped up with the words *offer* and *condition*. But take the doctrine down to its simplest form. At its heart the doctrine of the well-meant offer

3 Herman Hoeksema, “Rest for the Weary,” *Standard Bearer* 1, no. 10 (July 1925); reprinted in *Standard Bearer* 63, no. 10 (March 15, 1987): 266–69.

is devoid of election. By the admission of the doctrine's proponents, the calling in the well-meant gospel offer does not proceed from election, but the calling proceeds from God's general attitude of favor toward humanity in general.

Neither does Cammenga's doctrine of the calling have election in it. There is something in his doctrine for everyone. There is a decision that all who hear must make. There is no inevitability in his doctrine from election to calling to salvation. His doctrine is potentiality and possibility. As far as his audience is concerned, God has an offer of salvation to everyone who hears the gospel, if they will come to Christ. Cammenga's doctrine of the calling is not God's carrying out his plan of salvation by the calling. Cammenga's doctrine of the calling is man's making effectual the sacrifice of Christ for himself and his own enjoyment of salvation. To make the kind of disjunction that Cammenga makes between God's work and man's coming is to deny election and that God's election bears its fruit in the calling.

Further, the well-meant gospel offer has at its heart a contingency. That contingency means that there is the possibility that those who are called do not come. The offer of God goes to all, and it depends on a response from man. So also Cammenga's doctrine teaches. Indeed, the one follows from the other. Because his doctrine of the calling is election-less, it is also a doctrine that contains the possibility that those who are called do not come. His word to his audience—and remember, he does not view those who hear as unbelievers and worldly people—which is the church, is that if you do not come, there is no salvation and no enjoyment of salvation. Man is able to frustrate the will and power of God expressed in the calling to come.

It is completely inconceivable that God elects his people, that Christ dies and is resurrected for his people, and that his elect people not come to Christ. "Come to me!" says Christ. That is not the proclamation of a condition. That is the proclamation of the sovereign Lord, who carries out his counsel of election and draws his people unto himself.

Calling as God's Work

Before I define the calling, I want to emphasize three things about the calling that by themselves refute every corruption of the doctrine of the calling and especially the corruption of Cammenga's Arminian conception of the calling that it is not enough for your salvation that Christ died, but also you must come to Jesus.

The calling is the work of the triune, sovereign God. The calling is the work of the triune, sovereign God to carry out in the elect sinner, at the level of the sinner's

consciousness, God's decree appointing that sinner to salvation. The calling is about the work of God. The calling is not about what man must do. The calling is not about what man is able to do. The calling is not the proclamation of the condition for man's experience and enjoyment of his salvation. The calling is about God and his sovereign work of grace.

The analogy here is the creation of the world. Frequently in scripture the calling of the sinner to Christ is described in terms of God's creation of the world. For example, Romans 4:17 says, "Even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." God is the God of the calling in creation and in salvation. In both he calls into being that which is not. The work of salvation is more wonderful than creation in that God's calling raises dead people to life.

The same thought is found in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29:

26. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:
27. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;
28. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:
29. That no flesh should glory in his presence.

God is the God who not only calls but who also calls the things that are not. He does this in creation and in salvation. The purpose is that no flesh glory in his presence. If one's doctrine of the calling allows men to glory, which Cammenga's does, then that is also its condemnation. Cammenga, in fact, denigrates the work of Christ in favor of the obedience of man to God's calling. The issue in Cammenga's doctrine is not God but man. Cammenga robs God of his glory and gives it to man. The purpose of the doctrine of the calling in scripture is that God receives all the glory, as indeed he does, if the calling of the elect in salvation is like God's calling in creation in the beginning. Man is nothing in that calling. God is everything in that calling.

This analogy between God's calling of us and his creation of the world is also found in 2 Corinthians 4:6: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." As foolish as it is to focus on light and the act of light becoming when light was called, so foolish is it to focus on the sinner and his coming when the sinner is called. The focus is not light or the sinner, but the focus is God

and his sovereignty and power. The point is not to say, “Oh, see how light came forth” or “See how the sinner came” but to say, “Oh, behold the power and glory of God, who causes light to be and who calls sinners out of darkness into his marvelous light.” When speaking about the calling, the point that the calling is about the work of God cannot be emphasized too much. When one starts with the principle that the calling is about God and his wonderwork in Christ, then one never can arrive at the sort of doctrine of the calling as taught by Cammenga. His doctrine is the fruit of making the calling about man and what man must do for salvation and the experience of salvation. Cammenga’s doctrine of the calling is a doctrine of man.

Calling Proceeds from Election

Further, and before I come to the specific definition of what this work of the triune, sovereign God in calling is, I must emphasize that the calling proceeds from election. The calling and election are inseparable, and the one cannot be discussed without the other. Wherever calling is mentioned or taught, whether explicitly or implicitly, election is in view as the source. Wherever election is taught, calling is there as the fruit. So 2 Timothy 1:9 teaches that God “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” Here I note that the calling of the child of God is according to God’s purpose, which purpose is the election of his people in Christ.

I note also and will note throughout the course of my treatment of the various doctrines of our salvation that our calling is simply synonymous with our salvation. Calling is our salvation. Scripture often speaks this way about the various benefits of salvation. Regeneration is our salvation. Calling is our salvation. Union with Christ is our salvation. Justification is our salvation. Sanctification is our salvation. This idea refutes the common notion that there is a temporal order of salvation in which salvation is given in installments and that those installments are mutually dependent upon one another. The point of presenting salvation as mutually dependent installments is to introduce the activities of man as vital to the reception of the next benefit of salvation. So, for instance, God regenerates and calls man. Man is then to respond positively and come. Man’s coming then issues in his faith, and his activity of faith issues

in his justification. But scripture has a different viewpoint. Each benefit of salvation is salvation. When we are regenerated, we are saved. When we are called, we are saved. When we are united to Christ, we are saved. When we are justified, we are saved. And this is true of all the benefits of salvation. They are salvation. And, if I may speak foolishly for a moment, if you would die immediately at the point of your calling, then you would be saved and go to heaven.

Also Romans 8:29–30 teaches the inseparable source of the calling in election:

29. Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
30. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Exactly because the elect sinner and the whole elect church were in fact reconciled to God at the cross, so they must be reconciled to God in their own minds.

There is no man or the activities of man in this golden chain of salvation. Calling proceeds from, is demanded by, and is the fruit and effect of election. In a very real sense, election obtains for God’s people the promise and salvation by means of the calling.

This vital connection between election and calling is the point of the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 1:10: “Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” Here the apostle exhorts the Christian to make his calling and election sure. The explanation of this is that when the believer hears God address him in the depth of his being through the preaching of the gospel, then the work of God in that calling is to assure the believer of his election by God. This is because of the inseparable relationship between election and calling as between cause and effect or root and fruit.

Christ taught the inseparable connection between calling and election both positively in the case of the elect and negatively in the case of the reprobate. So we read in John 10:26–27: “Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” Jesus speaks of the calling when he speaks of his voice. He knows whom he calls because he elected them. His sheep hear Jesus’ voice and follow him as the fruit and effect of his calling to them. In the case of the reprobate, Jesus does not call them. He never knew them. And they do not come to Christ and believe in Christ because they are reprobate.

To illustrate that where calling is mentioned, election is in view, I point out Acts 2:39 and Peter's proclamation of the promise on Pentecost: "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Peter preached the promise to all who heard. However, the promise is unto those and those only whom God calls. According to Romans 8:29, those whom God calls are those whom he foreknew and whom he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Once again, it must be emphasized that if one starts with the inseparable relationship between calling and election, one never can arrive at Cammenga's doctrine of the calling. His doctrine of the calling is election-less. Election, on the contrary, finds its fruit in the calling and the salvation of those called according to God's purpose.

The Cross and Calling

One more point that must be emphasized is the relationship between the cross and the calling. By "the cross" I mean Christ's incarnation, lifelong obedience, atoning suffering, resurrection, ascension, and glorification. The incarnation culminated in the cross. And the cross is the ground for the glorification of Christ and his receiving from God the promise of the Holy Spirit. In his sermon Cammenga specifically said that the cross is not enough for salvation. Now, that is incredible! The cross accomplished salvation. Christ said at his cross that the whole will and counsel of God for our salvation is finished! Christ justified his elect church at the cross, about which God gave testimony when he raised Christ from the dead. At the cross he was our complete and perfect savior, in whose wounds we find unspeakable consolation. As with the truth of the relationship between election and the calling, so we must speak about the relationship of the cross and the calling. The cross is not to be placed in juxtaposition with the coming of the sinner to Christ. The cross was not that which merely made possible the sinner's coming

to Christ, but the cross was the very ground and foundation of the sinner's coming to Christ. Exactly because the elect sinner and the whole elect church were in fact reconciled to God at the cross, so they must be reconciled to God in their own minds. They must, in short, be called unto him. Such is the apostle's teaching about the calling in 2 Corinthians 5:18–21:

18. All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;
19. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.
20. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.
21. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

One cannot ever teach Cammenga's doctrine of the calling if one starts where the apostle started. We are elect. We are reconciled. Now, be reconciled! That is the divine, effectual word that God makes to resonate in the hearts of his elect people, drawing them irresistibly to himself and into his covenant fellowship.

How, then, do we define that calling by God of his elect? The calling is the wonderwork of God's grace in Christ whereby God addresses the elect sinner in the depth of his being and on the level of his consciousness, summoning him from darkness to light and translating him from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. In this calling the elect sinner is drawn irresistibly to Christ by the Father and comes to Christ willingly.

I will develop this subject in the next editorial, the Lord willing.

—NJL

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

THE ANTITHESIS (1): LETTING OUR REFORMED FATHER SPEAK

Four years ago, on January 21, 2021, the Act of Separation was signed by believers who previously were members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, thus forming First Reformed Protestant Church. Two nights prior, five officebearers from Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church met to draft the Act and distribute it to the members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. It was a chilly winter evening, with the snow gently falling to the ground, the glow of the streetlights illuminating the road, and a serene silence lingering over the creation—the calm before the storm.

The Protestant Reformed denomination had clearly manifested herself as the false church and had cast out Christ and the truth.

For this reason, the undersigned, officebearers of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church and members of the Protestant Reformed Churches, now flee from the coming destruction, according to the solemn warnings of the Word of God. “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction” (Jer. 5:30–6:1; see also 6:10–12). “Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it” (Jer. 6:17–19).¹

The Act called believers to separate from the Protestant Reformed Churches.

According to the Word of God and the holy duty of believers, we separate ourselves from this untoward generation and come out from among them...²

The document flew through the denomination at warp speed. On January 21, 2021, men, women, and children, convicted of the departure of the Protestant Reformed Churches from the fundamental truths of the unconditional covenant and justification by faith alone, met and signed the Act. God had said to flee from the coming destruction, and in obedience to the word of God, many heeded the call to separate from the Protestant Reformed Churches. Truly, God plucked out his people like brands from the fire and freed their souls as birds from the snare of the fowler. God had begun his reformation of the church institute.

Since then the Reformed Protestant Churches fiercely have been battling the foes of the gospel. Many who originally joined have departed. They are the fearful and unbelieving (Rev. 21:8). They are those who heard the word and anon with joy received it for a time but in the end were revealed to have a false, imitation faith—faith that never was united to Jesus Christ, for true faith united to Christ never turns back (Heb. 10:38–39).

There is once again controversy within the Reformed Protestant Churches. The struggle in the churches can be summarized in one word: the antithesis. However, this concept is not new. The very foundation of the Reformed Protestant Churches is the covenant and the antithesis.

The idea of the antithesis and its calling to come out of the apostatizing Protestant Reformed Churches is writ large all over the Act of Separation. Many of the scripture passages cited refer to the antithesis. In accordance with Belgic Confession article 28, the writers of the Act called

¹ Act of Separation, 2–3, <https://firstrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Act-of-Separation.pdf>.

² Act of Separation, 3.

it “the holy *duty* of believers” to separate themselves from the false church. While article 28 refers to the church institute, the child of God does not divide his life in such a way that how and where he worships on Sunday is fundamentally different from his life of worship the other six days of the week. The very fact that anyone is a member of the Reformed Protestant Churches demonstrates that while the antithesis is a spiritual reality, there is a duty and a calling that flows out of that spiritual reality. If the antithesis is only spiritual, why did any of us bother to leave the Protestant Reformed Churches? The Protestant Reformed denomination had manifested herself as an enemy of God and of the truth. Being made God’s friends, and at the same time being enemies of all those who oppose God, we heeded the call to separate ourselves from her and her members.

God says to his people, “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:6). God is the holy God. And he manifested his holiness in his Son, Jesus Christ, who warred against all profanity and corruption. In Christ God’s people are made holy. They are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God’s dear Son. When God calls his people to be holy, that is the living reality of the elect children of God.

God causes his people to know the holiness of his name. He brings them into his fellowship and makes them holy. The elect children of God are holy in Christ, and being holy in principle now, they war against all that is unholy. The child of God will always manifest himself as a child of the light. He will inevitably bear fruit in keeping with the wonder of grace that God has performed in his heart. Thus when God calls his people to be holy, it is impossible that they not walk accordingly, separating themselves from unfruitful works of darkness and the unclean thing in obedience to God’s command.

The blaspheming of God’s holy name by the lie of man is intolerable to God’s people. Knowing the holiness of God’s name and the darkness from whence he delivered them, God’s people seek to walk in the light. In zeal and love for God’s holy name and out of thankfulness for the gracious salvation given to them, God’s people obeyed the call to separate from the Protestant Reformed Churches. And with the word of God living in their hearts by grace, they continue to confess the truth of that word over against those who remain in that apostate church.

There is perhaps no doctrine more hated and snarled at in the church than the doctrine of the antithesis. I emphasize that—in *the church*. That was taught to and impressed upon me early and often in seminary.

Those who constantly ignore the antithesis are ignorant of God (2 Cor. 6:14–18). That is the practical significance of God’s holiness. Those who violate the antithesis deny God’s holiness. Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers. What concord hath Christ with Belial? None! It is a rhetorical question. Come out from among them, and be ye separate. Be holy! Live the antithesis. Stop fellowshiping with the impenitent, ungodly, temple of idols, and Belial. We are the temple that the train of God filled and that he took his place in as the holy God, and the calling now is to be holy. A major aspect of that calling is to be separate. It will be one of the most hated things in the church. In preaching this we will be fighting for and defending the holiness of God and the holiness of the people of God. Be separate from the world. Being separate does not bring us to God.³

The antithesis is one of the hardest doctrines because it demands of the believer that he condemn the lie and those who walk in darkness. The darkness is not some nebulous, faceless entity out there somewhere, but darkness often includes people whom you love—your parents; your children; your brothers and sisters; or those with whom you grew up, went to church or school, or played cards or baseball.

When I was taught that the preaching of the antithesis would be one of the most hated doctrines in the church, I believed it intellectually but not in my heart and experience. I thought that the Reformed Protestant Churches would love the preaching of the antithesis. I thought, “It is different now. It will be different for me in my ministry.”

It is not different. It is the one doctrine in my preaching against which there is almost unrelenting pressure to capitulate.

Instead of yielding to that pressure, I am going to write on this subject. The purpose of this series of articles then is to develop the doctrine of the antithesis and the calling of the antithesis. There is opposition to my preaching of the *calling* or *demand* of the antithesis. My preaching is being labeled and slandered as legalistic, extreme, and radical. No one has yet to prove from scripture or the creeds how these charges are true; the opposers simply make assertions and baseless accusations and level their unfounded charges of sin against the preaching.

To begin this series I am going to let our Reformed father, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, speak.

—TDO

³ This quotation comes from my notes from dogmatics class, locus theology, taught by Rev. Nathan J. Langerak on October 31, 2023.

Antithesis, Synthesis and Dualism

It is not many years ago that it was a rather generally accepted principle with Reformed people, that in this whole life, in every sphere of life in the midst of the world, the Christian was called to assume an antithetical attitude towards the world of darkness. For what did righteousness and unrighteousness have in common? Or what concord is there between Christ and Belial? The natural man minded the things of the flesh, and the carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be. Hence, he cannot see the Kingdom of God and will not seek God, but loves the darkness rather than light. But the spiritual man, who has been renewed by the Spirit and grace of God, according to the inner man of the heart, lives from the new principle of regeneration and reveals himself as a child of light. It is, therefore, not his calling to leave the world, but to live the whole of life from a different spiritual-ethical principle than the natural man. He is in the world but not of the world.

Of late this principle of the antithesis has generally been denied or silenced into oblivion. For a time those that were not at all in favor of the antithetical life-view still pretended to defend it, only claiming, that in this present time the antithesis is never absolute but only relative in actual manifestation. It is absolute in spiritual principle, but by virtue of the operation of a common grace there is also a certain practical synthesis in this world between the children of light and those of darkness. But lately one does not hear any more, even of this so-called relative antithesis. The antithesis is forgotten, both in theory and in practice.

Of course, this change of views and convictions does not alter the facts. Light and darkness are still antithetical with relation to each other; righteousness and unrighteousness are still mutually exclusive; Christ and Belial still refuse to be combined and united in fellowship of friendship. And still it is this principle of the antithesis that must needs dominate the entire life of the Christian in this world. He must fight the good fight even unto the end and it is given him of grace in the cause of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer with Him. Then, and then only, may he expect that he will also be glorified with Him.

What is meant by the antithesis? And, first of all, what is the antithetical lifeview in distinction from Dualism? The term antithesis as such signifies contrast, opposition. And as we use the term we have reference to the contrast, the opposition between light and darkness, between good and evil, between God and the devil,

between the Church and the world. But it cannot be denied that there are not a few, who, while they speak of the antithesis in this ethical-spiritual sense of the word, really have a dualistic conception of the relation between God and the devil and, consequently, of the relation between the Christian and the world. Dualism is very old. It is already developed among the heathen nations, especially of Persia and Egypt. Neither causes it surprise that dualistic philosophies and religions are developed among the nations. The existence of good and evil is a fact patent to all. The belief in some god is also as universal as the human race. Atheism was never seriously accepted by men, because in the heart of no man does God leave Himself without witness that He is. And thus thinking people came face to face with the very serious question: how must we explain the relation between good and evil on the one hand and God on the other. The conclusion they drew was that there were two primal causes, the one the cause of good, the other of evil; two gods, a good and an evil. They could not find unity between the two. In what way the existence of good and evil, both physical and moral could be explained from one god, they did not see. And so they accepted the awful theory of a double deity. These two gods were at war with each other in the world. And the hope of these dualists was that they believed that the good god would ultimately triumph over all the forces of the evil god and the light would have the victory. Not so seldom they applied these dualistic views to the world as they saw it. Sin and suffering as they saw it, are inevitably connected with life in the flesh, with matter; while all that is good was connected with spirit. And thus they arrived at the dualism between matter and spirit. The spirit was good and was created by the good God, matter was evil and was either itself the eternal source of evil, or was created by the evil god. Hence, salvation consisted in fleeing from things material, that the spirit might rule and have the victory. Asceticism offered the best practical rule of life. Crucify the flesh in that sense of the word, was the slogan. Flee from the present world, chastise the body, and you shall be saved. The more you deny life to the body and to the things of the body, the better and the more effectively you fight the evil god.

It cannot be denied, that at a very early date this dualistic view made an attempt to gain entrance into the Church of Christ. Already the apostle Paul warned against it in his epistle to the Colossians (11:20–22). He speaks of the rudiments of the world and of being subject to ordinances. He mentions these commandments

and ordinances of men as expressed in the slogan: "Touch not, taste not, handle not." The same tendency became manifest somewhat later in the asceticism of men that withdrew into the desert and lived for years on lonely pillars, to seek the most absolute seclusion from the world conceivable and overcome the power of the flesh. And the same dualistic principles lie at the basis of Roman Catholic monasticism. They leave the world and recede into the solitude offered behind the walls of convent or monastery as the height of godliness in this world and the most effective way to save one's soul. Chastisement of the body was a matter of, at least a means to sanctification. Celibacy was holier than the married life. All because the material world and the life of the body itself was conceived as the seat of all evil and the victory of the spirit was the triumph of the good.

Now, although it cannot be denied, there are even today many people who conceive of the opposition between God and the devil in this dualistic way and, therefore, create a dualistic relation between the Church and the world, while they imagine they are speaking of the antithesis, the latter has really nothing in common with the former except the appearance, the semblance of things. You know as well as I, that many people think in terms of dualism, while they speak of the antithesis. They begin to speak of God and Satan, as if the two were eternal and were two independent sources, the one of Good, the other of evil. God creates a good world; the evil makes it evil; for a time there is a battle, caused by the fact, that God determines to regain the world and restore it to its original goodness and purity, and finally, after a long struggle, God has the victory over the devil and the latter is banished to everlasting punishment, together with the wicked. Such is often the presentation of this matter. It is principally dualistic. And it is a poor and gloomy life-view. For, first of all, it is an attack upon, at least a denial of the absolute Godhead of God and postulates a power next to Him, that works independently of Him. And, secondly, this power of evil, the devil and his host may ultimately be subjugated and defeated, in the meantime they accomplish much evil, cause much suffering and create a good deal of everlasting destruction in the work of God. And the proper antithetical view differs from this dualism principally and in many respects. Dualism postulates two primal causes, two gods, the antithesis starts from the fundamental principle: God is God and He alone. There is no God beside Him. Dualism presents the present relation between the good and evil as a duel, in which the power of evil gains many temporary victories; the antithesis knows of no such thing, but maintains that God at all times executes His counsel and that the powers of darkness certainly serve His purpose and nothing

else. Dualism conceives of the end of all things as merely the defeat of evil and a restoration of the original state of things; the antithesis emphasizes that all the operation of the powers of darkness must serve to lead all things to a state of glory and bliss that could otherwise never have been reached.

Let me, then, briefly, draw the antithetical line.

God is a light and there is no darkness in Him. He alone is God and He is good. His very being is good, and evil cannot come forth from Him. He is righteousness, justice and truth, love and holiness and purity, the absolute Good in Himself. And in Him there is no unrighteousness, no corruption, no lie, no evil. That is why God is beautiful and glorious. And as the Triune God He lives the life of the most glorious and blessed, eternal covenant-fellowship in Himself. He exists of Himself and by Himself, and apart from Him there is nothing that has any being. He is not the greatest among all gods, but He is God alone. He is not the supreme good in comparison with other good, but He is the sole Good and the Fountain of all good that is. God is God and God is good. There is no power apart and independent from Him. And there is no evil, no darkness in God. This is really the most fundamental principle of all the Word of God, the starting point of all true conceptions.

In the second place, we must remember, that God determined to reveal Himself unto the glory of His Most Holy Name. To reveal His glory is the motive and purpose of all His counsel, of His everlasting good pleasure. For He made all things for His Own Name's sake, even the wicked unto the day of evil. And He raises Pharaoh for no other purpose than to reveal His power and glory through Him. Hence, God in His counsel determines to reveal the glory of His Name antithetically, to manifest the glory of His Being on the dark background of, in contrast with, in opposition to evil. He determines from everlasting not only to reveal that He is Truth, but to do this in opposition to the lie; not only to manifest that He is Righteousness, but to accomplish this in opposition to Unrighteousness; to reveal that He is Holiness, but in contrast with corruption. In a word, God in His counsel conceives of the antithesis, that is, the revelation of His glorious light-Being, full of grace and truth, in antithesis to darkness full of horror and the lie. That He loves the truth and hates the lie, that He loves righteousness and holiness and hates unrighteousness and corruption, that is what the Most High determines in His everlasting counsel to make manifest. So that we must certainly maintain that in His eternal counsel God has willed the darkness and all that is connected therewith, but always in such a way, that He conceives of it as an object of His hatred and displeasure, that the glory of His Name may

be extolled. Never does darkness appear in God's counsel as the object of His love and pleasure. He has no pleasure in sin and corruption. But neither may we explain the existence of evil as independent from God's eternal will and decree. For our God is in the heavens; He doeth whatsoever He pleases. And God's counsel shall stand, He shall accomplish all His good pleasure. And the evil which God conceives in His counsel always serves the purpose to enhance the glory of His Name.

In the third place, we must recall, that for this purpose God wills a people of His covenant, that shall exist to the glory of His Name and whose sole purpose is to shew forth His praises and to manifest His glorious virtues. They must be partakers of His nature and life, they must be bearers of His image, they must be vessels of His light, manifestations of His righteousness and truth, of His Holiness and grace and love. For the realization of the counsel of God, they must be of His party. And since it was God's eternal purpose to reveal this glory antithetically, as over against the darkness of the lie, unrighteousness and corruption this power of darkness must be there in the vessels of wrath and the children of light must be brought into closest connection with them, in order that they may manifest the light and condemn the darkness, stand for the truth and condemn the lie, walk in holiness and love and condemn corruption and enmity of God. Thus God conceives of the vessels of mercy and those of wrath, that the former may reveal the glory of God's virtues over against and in opposition to the powers of darkness. Thus is God's eternal purpose. For He is the potter and we are the clay. And it is His sovereign prerogative to make known His power and glory in vessels of honour and of dishonour, and to raise Pharaoh for the purpose of revealing the glory of His infinite Name. Such is the counsel of election and reprobation. They are not two coordinate parts of God's counsel, but the latter serves the former. Reprobation serves both to bring out the glory of election and to lead in a way of opposition and sin God's covenant to highest conceivable glory.

Such is the idea of the antithesis.

Thus God executes it in time.

He creates Adam, the first man and makes him of His party, His covenant friend. He creates him in His own image, in order that He may truly know his God, live with Him in covenant-fellowship, and serve Him in love with all his heart and mind and soul and strength. He is God's prophet, to know Him and glorify Him in praise and adoration; He is God's priest, to love Him and to consecrate himself to Him with all things; and he is king under God to have dominion over all earthly things in the Name of his God and according to His ordinances. But he must be such antithetically. It is his

calling to be of God's party over against darkness. Hence, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is placed in paradise the first. Hence, the devil is permitted to appear on the scene, whose name is slanderer and adversary, all according to God's counsel. Thus the forces of opposition were created, and it was Adam's calling to be God's covenant-friend, to maintain the name and glory of his God in opposition to the powers of darkness. Henceforth he could no longer serve God without also opposing the devil. But the first man falls and violates God's covenant, all according to the determinate counsel of God. By his fall in sin he becomes wholly corrupt and darkness, so that his mind and will is enmity against the living God. There is no good left in him. All is unrighteousness and corruption. And standing as the head and father and root of the entire race, he can nevermore bring forth a clean thing out of an unclean. His children, as he brings them forth, will be like him, dead in sin and misery, seed of the devil, who henceforth is their spiritual father. He will bring forth a race, that consists of children of wrath by nature and whose desire it is to do the will of their father the devil.

Yet, God maintains His covenant. For in His counsel He had chosen His people in Christ and determined that in the second Adam they should be perfected, after they had fought the good fight. This covenant God establishes immediately, for according to God's counsel, Christ the second Adam, stands behind the first man. He establishes and maintains His covenant by putting enmity between this people in Christ and the seed of the devil. And so it is, that although by nature Adam can bring forth only children of wrath, corrupt in sin, through the power of grace, he also becomes the father of a new race, the spiritual seed of the woman. But, again according to God's counsel and for the purpose of the antithesis, not all the natural children of Adam are also children of the promise and of grace. The covenant as maintained in Christ does not include all, but only those whom God has chosen and given to His Son from before the foundation of the world. The development of the race henceforth follows the line of election and reprobation, of the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And thus you have the beginning of the historical development of the antithesis. Adam becomes the progenitor of two peoples, the elect and the reprobate, the righteous and ungodly. From a natural point of view they have all things in common. They are both part of the natural organism in Adam, of the same flesh and blood. They have the same natural life, the same body and the same soul, the same mind and will, the same talents and powers. And they live in the same world. They till the same soil and receive the same rain and the

same sunshine, they work in the same factory and often at the same bench. Not infrequently they live in the same home and are most closely related from a natural point of view. They develop the same institutions, are subjects of the same state, members of the same society, speak the same language as members of the same nation, and even are not so infrequently members of the same Church. In a word, from a natural point of view they have all things in common and live in the most close relationship conceivable. But all this is nothing more than the battleground upon which light and darkness clash, upon which the powers of sin and grace develop and come to manifestation. For, although these two peoples have everything in common from a natural point of view, they have nothing in common from a spiritual-ethical point of view. Although they are alike as long as you view them from the viewpoint of their relation to this world and to earthly things, they stand opposed as soon as you view them again in their relation to God. For the natural children of Adam live from the principle of enmity against God. They are children of darkness. And they reveal and develop their life from this spiritual point of view everywhere, in all spheres and with all the means of this present life. Their main spiritual principle is always that they set themselves against God, with all their powers and talents and means and institutions. They do not seek after God and they do not follow after righteousness. They are of this world. And not seeking after the city that hath foundations, they seek to establish a kingdom of the world, separated from God and His Christ, in which the glory of sinful man may be enhanced. But the children of grace are principally different. They have a new life, the life of regeneration, the life of the risen Christ. And from the principle of this new life they develop and manifest themselves in every sphere of life. They serve God and they reject Mammon. They love Christ and they hate the devil. They walk as children of light and they condemn the ungodly works of darkness. And they shew forth the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. Such is their calling. It is God's purpose with them. It is not their calling to gain the whole world for Christ, neither is it their calling to leave the world, but to be in the world, in all the world, in every sphere of the life of this world, on the whole of its battleground, only living from the principle of grace and the life of regeneration, according to the Word of God. Such is the antithesis. And living as children of light the darkness will hate them and will employ the powers and means of darkness to overcome them. Outwardly they may also seem to be submerged in the battle and to be defeated by the powers of darkness, even as Christ on Golgotha. But spiritually they have the victory. They are of God's party.

God fights His battle thru them. And God thru Christ will give them the ultimate victory, in the day when all the powers of darkness shall only prove to have worked together for the most glorious revelation of the Name of the Most High!

II. Now this antithesis is denied in more than one way. It is denied first of all by the pernicious doctrine of Common Grace. Also this theory attempts to offer a life-view of the things of this present time. Its fundamental conception is after all, that the devil struck a hole into the work of God as He originally formed it and would have destroyed it, were it not for the intervention of common grace. If God had not intervened thru the power of common grace, so is the supposition, man would immediately have been sent into eternal death and destruction and the whole world would have returned to its original state of chaos, or perhaps been annihilated. But God prevents this devilish scheme. He carries through the original purpose of creation. This world must develop. The powers of this world must be brought to light, may not be destroyed by sin. Not until all the forces of the world have been developed and it has become manifest how beautiful a world God formed in the beginning, can the world be destroyed to be replaced by the final restoration of paradise lost. For this purpose God sends a twofold grace, a temporary grace and an eternal, a general and a particular. By virtue of the former, which is God's lovingkindness over all men, the righteous and the wicked alike, human life is preserved and not immediately destroyed, the curse is tempered in its tendency to destroy, and the earth and its fulness are preserved. Moreover, the power and progress of sin are checked. If this general grace had not come man would have been wholly a child of darkness, a pronounced enemy of God, only committing sin and never doing anything good. He would have been wholly like the devil. But now it is different. True, it is maintained, the natural man of himself is only a sinner and he cannot do anything good while he is inclined to all evil. But common grace improves upon him, to such an extent that he can still do much good, even though it is no good that saves him. In all the spheres of life that pertain to this present world, in the home, in the state, in society, in business and commerce, in science and art, he lives from this principle of a common and general and temporal grace and is able to will and to think and to accomplish much good. But by means of another, a special grace, God saves the sinner, uproots the evil principle within him and prepares him for final glory. So that while the ungodly live from the principle of this common grace in the world, the godly live both from this same principle of common grace and that of particular or saving grace.

It is not difficult to see, where lies the fundamental error of this conception. It after all looks upon this entire present history as an interval which has been necessitated because of sin. God's purpose is to perfect *this present creation*, not to perfect and glorify His covenant thru the deep way of sin and grace. For a time this purpose is frustrated thru the power of the devil and sin. But God carries it thru and reaches it in spite of the attempts of the devil. And not only that this world has its history and development according to an original purpose as it would have been without sin, but He also restores the original perfection of the whole creation. All this is accomplished by the power of common and special grace. Strange though it may sound, but the theory of common grace is dualistic after all. It dares not conceive of sin as nothing but a means for the realization of God's covenant and the development of His counsel to the glory of His Name. Hence, it also confuses God's providence, whereby He maintains and preserves all things, so that the sphere and battlefield for the principles of sin and grace may be provided, with grace. What is after all nothing but means, for the ungodly to develop as ungodly and become ripe for destruction, and for the godly to reveal themselves and develop as children of light, is considered as grace and lovingkindness of the Lord, common to all. And what is after all only sin, as soon as it is judged in the light of the law of God, is called good.

But we are not so much concerned with the criticism and exposition of the errors of this conception as with the clear fact, that it destroys the antithesis. If it is true, that in this present life and with a view to their earthly development God is gracious to all, and has a covenant of friendship with all men, what business have we not to be friends with those to whom the Lord is gracious? Certainly, the outcry of the poet must be eliminated from Scripture: "Should I not hate [them] Lord that hate thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred!" God is the friend of all, be it only for the present and with a view to the affairs of the present time. We have no business to be enemies of those that are in this life the friends of God. Besides, do we not live from a common principle of life in this world? The world does good. Not saving good, it is true, but good in the sight of God. It does so from the grace of God wrought in their hearts by the Holy Spirit of God. Shall we then separate ourselves and condemn the good and lovely works of the world? No, but we shall rather unite with them, and do things in common. Together we can labor for the building up of the home,

of society, of the state, of commerce and industry, of science and art. It is only a matter of tradition that we still have Christian Schools. The school also belongs to the sphere of common grace. The calling of God's people to live from a different principle than the world is denied. The antithesis is absolutely destroyed! We may be *in* the world and *of* the world both, for together we live of the power of common grace!

But this is not the only way in which the principle of the antithesis is destroyed. It is denied just as well, by all those movements that would separate themselves from the world in the sense that they would go out of the world. It is Dr. Kuyper's repeated assertion that you must choose between his view and that of all Dualism that would live a separate existence, and create a separate field and sphere of life for the godly and the ungodly. Yet, this is not the case. The dualistic philosophy confuses the battleground with the battle that must be fought on it. It conceives of the battlefield itself as evil. Sin is inseparably bound up with the things of this present time and with our life in the body. Hence, they that adhere to this view would leave the world as much as possible. They do not want to be in the world. They would like to gather the people of God on a separate island, in a separate state and separate them from all contact with the ungodly. They would flee out of the world. They would seek refuge in monasteries and convents, in order to avoid all contact with sin. They would live in deserts and holes, in order to be safe. But also this is wrong. Not only is it a mere delusion that we can escape conflict with the powers of darkness by separating ourselves literally and locally from the world, for the simple reason that we carry the powers of darkness with us in our own flesh and heart,—the antithesis is within us; but it is also a fleeing from the battlefield and an attempt to frustrate God's purpose with us. It is the purpose of God that light may shine in the darkness and that the light may condemn the darkness. That purpose cannot be reached by a dualistic flight from the world. All dualistic tendencies would have us not only not be of the world, but neither would they have us in the world!

Hence, we must maintain the antithetic view of life and the world. God establishes His covenant with us antithetically. We cannot serve Him without rejecting and fighting mammon. In the world and not of the world, living in all the domains of life, but from the principle of light, condemning the darkness, such is the purpose of God with His people and our calling, till the victory is won!¹

1 Herman Hoeksema, "Antithesis, Synthesis and Dualism," *Standard Bearer* 4, no. 15 (May 1, 1928): 353–57.

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

SACRIFICES (7): SAMAK

*He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering;
and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. — Leviticus 1:4*

The Requirement

Last time we considered the general material requirement for all bloody sacrifices that God gave to his people in Leviticus 1:2: “If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.” What we notice if we proceed to the next verse is the commencement of God’s requirements for each of the different kinds of sacrifices, beginning first with the law for the burnt offering: “If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer...” (v. 3). Following the law for the burnt offering is the law for the non-bloody meat offering that accompanied certain bloody sacrifices (Lev. 2), then the law for the peace offering (Lev. 3), and finally the laws for the sin and trespass offerings (Lev. 4–6:17). We will consider these different kinds of sacrifices in the future. But for the purpose of the present article, let us proceed to Leviticus 1:4 and observe God’s requirement that the Israelite “shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering.”

This ritual in which the Israelite placed his hand upon the head of the sacrificial animal was common to every kind of bloody sacrifice. Every animal that was slaughtered at the altar passed under this imposition of the placement of a hand, and no animal was killed apart from it. Although verse 4 only refers to the imposition of hands upon the burnt offering, the ritual is also specifically mentioned in connection with the peace offering (Lev. 3:2, 8, 13) and the sin offering (Lev. 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33). Scripture does not explicitly state that the ritual belonged to

the trespass offering, but because of how closely the trespass offering was related to the sin offering, we have no reason to exclude this ritual from the trespass offering.¹ If blood was shed in the courts of the temple, then it was always preceded by this imposition of a hand upon the head of an animal.

“He shall put [*samak*] his hand upon the head of the burnt offering.”

Samak is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for this act that God required of his people. *Samak* means *to lean upon*. The word is translated thus in Amos 5:19: “As if a man...went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall.” Implied in *samak* is the exertion of much energy, so that the object is burdened with the weight of the subject. Such is the picture in Psalm 88:7, where the wrath of God is the subject of *samak*: “Thy wrath *lieth hard* upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves” (emphasis added). Therefore, the scene described in Leviticus 1:4 is not that of an Israelite lightly tapping his fingers on the crown of his animal but rather that of an Israelite using all the strength of his body to force the animal’s head downward. And scholars agree on this point. For example, Alfred Edersheim wrote that *samak* was “to be done with one’s whole force—as it were, to lay one’s whole weight upon the [animal].”² And Johann Kurtz pointed out that Jewish rabbis taught *samak* as “an act which required the strongest energy and resoluteness both of mind and will...[being] performed with all the powers of the body.”³

Because God required that his people perform *samak*

1 Leviticus 7:7 clearly relates the trespass offering to the sin offering when it states, “As the sin offering is, so is the trespass offering: there is one law for them.” It is my judgment that scripture does not explain every detail of the trespass offering and leaves the ritual for the imposition of hands implied not only because of how similar the trespass offering was to the sin offering but also because scripture emphasizes the *restitution* that was peculiar to the trespass offering. As we will discover in a future article, when the Israelite brought an animal for the trespass offering, he also had to bring pecuniary compensation according to the appraisal of his crime. On the basis of these observations, I have no doubt that the law for the trespass offering required the imposition of hands just like the other bloody offerings. With this conclusion most scholars are agreed.

2 Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 82.

3 J. H. Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1863), 83.

for every kind of bloody sacrifice, it behooves us to examine the significance of this ritual before we take up a consideration of the individual sacrifices. The question before us is, what was God's purpose with *samak*? And to this question the following general answer may be given: *samak* denoted the vicarious nature of that bloody sacrifice to stand in the place of the sinner who appeared in the presence of Jehovah. *Samak* pointed to the eternal reality that Jesus Christ is the divinely appointed substitute whom God has made sin for all his elect, that they might be made the righteousness of God in him. But to arrive at this complete picture, we must note two aspects that belong to *samak*.

Transfer of Sin

What we must note first is that the offerer, who entered the doors of the tabernacle as a sinner, transferred his sin to the sacrificial victim through *samak*. The sinner pushed down with the full weight of his body upon the head of the animal and consequently burdened it with all the guilt of his sin. There can be no question about this first aspect of *samak*; neither can there be any room for disagreement. That *samak* effected a transfer of sin is clearly stated in Leviticus 16.

In Leviticus 16 God prescribed the law for the great feast of the old dispensation, the day of atonement. The day of atonement was the greatest annual feast among all the other feast days because on the day of atonement, the high priest went all the way past the veil of the inner sanctuary to stand for a few moments before the face of Jehovah. For the saint in the old dispensation, that particular event on the day of atonement was the most glorious moment that could possibly occur under the law. There was nothing higher than that: a man entered into the presence of Jehovah—and *lived!*

But when the high priest passed through the veil, he could not enter without blood. A bloody sacrifice was required, a sacrifice that stood at the head of all the other bloody sacrifices offered throughout the year. On the day of atonement, the high priest took two kids of the goats from the congregation of Israel and presented them before Jehovah at the door of the tabernacle “for a sin offering” (v. 5, emphasis added). Those two kids represented *one* sacrificial victim: the first was slaughtered in the ordinary manner and its blood was collected to sprinkle before Jehovah, and the second was sent away into the wilderness as a symbol of the complete removal of sin from the camp. The purpose of the second goat was to represent vividly the effect that the first goat's death accomplished.

The relevance of Leviticus 16 to the present topic is made clear by what God required the high priest to

perform upon the second goat before its dismissal from the camp:

21. Aaron shall lay [*samak*] both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness:
22. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. (Lev. 16:21–22)

What scripture makes abundantly clear is that the high priest put “all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins” upon the head of the live goat through *samak*. *Samak* bound and burdened all the sins of the people upon that animal, such that the Israelites saw no mere goat depart from the camp but rather saw their own sins being led away, never to be seen or heard of again.

If this is scripture's testimony concerning the significance of *samak* on the day that stood at the head of the entire sacrificial system in the old dispensation, then we must conclude that in the case of every bloody sacrifice—regardless of whether the sacrifice was a burnt offering, peace offering, sin offering, or trespass offering—*samak* represented the transfer of sins. When the sacrifice had reference to the sins of an individual, that individual placed his hand upon the creature and burdened it with his sins. When the sacrifice had reference to the sins of the whole congregation, then the elders of the congregation, as representatives of the whole body, laid their hands upon the head of the victim to burden it with the congregation's sins (Lev. 4:15). In either case, what was transferred to the victim was nothing more or less than sins.

What must be rejected is the fanciful notion of certain scholars that *samak* represented a transfer of something more or something other than sin. What is taught by such men is that the offerer transferred the inward feelings and disposition of his own heart through *samak*, which feelings or disposition varied depending on the kind of sacrifice that the offerer brought near to the altar. On this matter C. F. Keil wrote,

If the desire of the sacrificer was to be delivered from a sin or trespass, he would transfer his sin and trespass to the victim; but if, on the other hand, he desired through the sacrifice to consecrate his life to God, that he might receive strength for the attainment of holiness, and for a

walk well-pleasing to God, he would transfer this desire, in which the whole effort of his soul was concentrated, to the sacrificial animal; so that in the latter, as in the former instance, the animal would henceforth take his place, and all that was done to it would be regarded as being done to the person who offered it. But if the intention was merely to express his gratitude for benefits and mercies received or hoped for, he would simply transfer this feeling of gratitude to the victim, so that it would represent his person only so far as it was absorbed into the good received or sought for.⁴

I do not deny that there is a final thought or end belonging to each bloody sacrifice that differentiated each one from the others. The final thought or end of the peace offering differed, for example, from the final thought or end of the trespass offering. But that does not necessarily infer that the meaning of *samak* must differ for every kind of bloody sacrifice. Neither must it be overlooked that *samak* never occurred when a non-bloody offering—a meat or drink offering—was brought into the temple. If the offerer sought to impart the disposition of his heart to his offering through *samak*, why was the ritual excluded when non-bloody offerings were brought?

This notion that the offerer transferred the inward feelings and disposition of his own heart seriously errs because it minimizes the reality that when the offerer entered the door of the tabernacle, he always entered as a sinner. He entered not merely as an *offerer*, but he entered as one who had grossly transgressed all the commandments of God and kept none of them. He entered as one who was still inclined to all evil. And that sinner came before God, who is terribly displeased with original as well as actual sins, who temporally and eternally punishes sin in his just judgment, who curses everyone who continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law, who does not suffer the fool to stand in his

presence, and who is a consuming fire and communes only with those who are holy as he is holy. When one comes before the presence of Jehovah, the thought of his heart must be:

Thou, Jehovah, art a God
Who delightest not in sin;
Evil shall not dwell with Thee,
Nor the proud Thy favor win.
Evildoers Thou dost hate,
Lying tongues Thou wilt defeat;
God abhors the man who loves
Violence and base deceit.⁵

At Sinai the word of God came to Israel through the moral law with thunderings, lightnings, the sound of the trumpet, a smoking mountain, and with such oppressive weightiness that the Israelites exclaimed to Moses, “Let

not God speak with us, lest we die!” In the presence of this God, the offerer stood. Thus the principal need of the sinner who entered God’s courts was forgiveness. The sinner had to know that God satisfied his justice against sin, that God in mercy did not impute to the sinner any of his iniquities nor any of his transgressions in all his sins. Only a fool would enter God’s courts with the first thought

of his heart being, “Let me transfer to this sacrifice my desire for fellowship or my gratitude for God’s gifts or my longing for a holy walk.” Such a man had not reckoned with the terrible reality of his own sin and sinful nature nor the awful holiness and transcendent majesty of God.

But through *samak* the sinner imparted all his sins to the sacrificial victim. In perfect harmony with this aspect of *samak*, there is the unanimous testimony of Jewish tradition that *samak* was always accompanied with the following confession of sin: “I beseech thee, O Lord; I have sinned, I have trespassed, I have rebelled; I have done this or that...but now I repent, and let this be my expiation.”⁶ And the insistence of the rabbis was that “where there is no confession of sins, there is no imposition of

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4 Quoted in Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament*, 86. I could not locate the original statement by Keil, but similar statements are made in C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *Pentateuch* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 508, 511; and C. F. Keil, *Manual of Biblical Archaeology*, trans. Peter Christie, ed. Frederick Crombie, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1887), 269. For a good summary of what various scholars have said on this matter, read *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament*, 84–101.

5 No. 9:2, 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).

6 Quoted in Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Westcott & Thomson, 1867), 134, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Va9ZAAAAAAAJ>.

hands, because imposition of hands belongs to confession of sins.”⁷

Furthermore, the notion that the offerer transferred the inward feelings and disposition of his own heart does not explain why in all the different kinds of bloody sacrifices, *samak* stood in the same local and temporal relationship to the subsequent slaughter of the animal. In all cases when *samak* was performed, the offerer put his sacrificial victim to death by slitting its throat with his own hand. That death of the animal was not a mere preliminary step to achieve the blood, fat, and flesh for the altar. Rather, that death was a penal death. That death was the wages of sin and the immediate consequence of bearing guilt in Jehovah’s presence. That death occurred because sin had been transferred to the sacrificial victim, and it had to be cut off from the land of the living. We are obliged to regard *samak* as a ritual by which the sinner transferred nothing more or less than sin and to uphold the same signification in every case.

Also, we must not ignore the second part of Leviticus 1:4, that after the Israelite pressed down upon the head of the animal, it was “accepted for him to make atonement for him.” Following *samak* the animal was accepted to make atonement. In the case of the burnt offering, *samak* did not have in view the offerer’s desire “to consecrate his life to God, that he might receive strength for the attainment of holiness, and for a walk well-pleasing to God,” as Keil taught. Rather, all the actions of the sinner and all the assistance that the sinner received from the priests were first and solely directed to the making of atonement.

As I pointed out in a foregoing article,⁸ the word *atonement* most basically means *to cover*. And when you consider atonement as a covering, then you must liken that to the covering of the best insurance policy that a man can receive. The word *atonement* has a very comprehensive idea in the Old Testament. Atonement is a covering that grants propitiation of the wrath of God, redemption from the curse of the law, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, and peace with God. Atonement perfectly satisfies the justice of God, which justice demands that the sinner who has offended God’s most high majesty be punished with everlasting punishment in body and soul.

That the sacrificial victim was accepted to make atonement means, in the language of the New Testament, that the sacrificial victim was *made* sin and *made* a curse for

the Israelite sinner (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). Being made sin through *samak*, the creature was cursed; and being cursed, the creature was condemned and sentenced to death. Following *samak* the sinner perceived in a figure what Isaiah saw in his prophetic ecstasy:

4. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
5. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Isa. 53:4–5)

After *samak* the animal became the surety of the sinner. The Israelite sinner fell under the umbrella of its atoning work. This brings us to the second aspect of *samak*.

Designating the Substitute

I do not believe that the significance of *samak* can be limited to a transfer of sin. It is my judgment that God also required *samak* to designate the proper *substitute* for such a transfer of sin. According to this second aspect of *samak*, the ritual expressed that the sacrificial victim was both appointed to a *position* of sinner meriting punishment and also burdened with that *responsibility* instead of or in behalf of the sinner.

The other usages of *samak* in scripture compel me to draw this conclusion. Scripture must inform our understanding of *samak* in connection with the bloody sacrifices. I say this over against a large number of scholars who claim that the offerer declared through *samak* that he willingly surrendered his own possession for the service of Jehovah.⁹ As plausible as this suggestion might be, nowhere does *samak* indicate such a notion in scripture. To teach such a notion reflects lazy scholarship. If the scriptural data concerning *samak* is studied, it becomes evident that *samak* also set apart a substitute to stand in one’s place.

Samak is used this way in Numbers 8, when the children of Israel put their hands upon the Levites, separating the Levites to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. God declared to Moses that the Levites “are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me” (v. 16). The Levites were set apart by God “instead of” the firstborn of the children of Israel to stand before him and to fulfill a lifelong service in

7 Quoted in Hodge, *The Atonement*, 134–35.

8 Luke Bomers, “Sacrifices (2): Their Overarching Doctrine,” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 1 (June 2023): 26–32.

9 See examples in C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, *Pentateuch*, 510–11. I have also found such a notion present in many commentaries that are easily accessible online.

his courts. This position to which the Levites were appointed was enacted by *samak*. “Thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord: and the children of Israel shall put [*samak*] their hands upon the Levites” (v. 10). Through *samak* the Levites were set apart as substitutes in the place of every firstborn from among the other tribes of Israel.

Samak is also used this way in Numbers 27, when Moses installed Joshua into office over Israel that he might stand in Moses’ place, since Moses could not lead Israel into the promised land. God told Moses to “put some of thine honor upon him” (v. 20), which honor was the position or office that God had bestowed upon Moses. Moses then took Joshua before the high priest and all the congregation, “and he laid [*samak*] his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses” (v. 23). The substitution of Joshua for Moses was enacted by *samak*, and Joshua subsequently was set apart for the position and responsibility to lead Israel.

Therefore, in harmony with the usage of *samak* in Numbers 8 and 27, I conclude that *samak* not only transferred sin to the animal but also designated that the animal occupied a position of service in behalf of the sinner and was responsible for that sinner’s sin. When the Israelite sinner pushed down with all his weight upon the sacrificial victim, it became in a real sense his representative or substitute. It was his legal representative, responsible for his debt of sins that had offended God’s most high majesty. It stood in a vicarious position, so that the nature of its death was vicarious satisfaction of God’s inviolable justice.

The Imprint of Christ

In connection with the bloody sacrifices, *samak* looked forward to the vicarious nature of Christ’s own sacrifice to make atonement for sin. When Christ came, he bore witness to this reality in Matthew 20:28: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” The word “for” is the Greek word *anti*, which means *in the stead of* or *in the place of*. Christ gave his life *in the place of* many as a substitute. Christ’s witness concerning himself was that he was the substitute of many—every single one of his elect people—to stand in their place and to represent them before the bar of divine justice. He presented himself before the

Father in behalf of his elect to appease the Father’s wrath by full satisfaction, to restore that which he took not away, and to suffer, the just for the unjust.

Samak testified that another was able to make satisfaction for sin as a substitute. That Christ was able to make such a satisfaction for his elect people has five necessary elements to it.

First, Christ was able to make satisfaction because God willed to be satisfied. I would be remiss if I failed to emphasize that *samak* had significance only because God directed it. Just as God told Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun and lay thy hand upon him,” so God told Israel through Moses, “Put thy hand upon the head of the offering; and it shall be accepted for thee to make atonement for thee.” This divine direction for *samak* must not

When the Israelite sinner pushed down with all his weight upon the sacrificial victim, it became in a real sense his representative or substitute. It was his legal representative, responsible for his debt of sins that had offended God’s most high majesty.

be neglected because only God can determine if he will have his justice satisfied by a substitute, and only God can make for himself such satisfaction. Over against man’s unpayable debt of sin, it is the work of God’s own mercy and justice to glorify himself by showing pity for the elect sinner and providing a surety for his salvation. God made the creature stand in the place of the sinner, and God made the sacrificial victim responsible for the sinner’s sin.

That is what is meant when Leviticus 1:4 states that the animal was “accepted” to make atonement. It was accepted to stand in the room and stead of the offerer because God was pleased that the substitute should do this. The animal was pleasing to God, not because God delights in the blood of bulls or goats but because by this appointment God was declaring, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (Isa. 42:1). Yes, God himself comes in Christ to satisfy his own justice in his eternal love for his people. It is *not* because of Christ’s satisfaction that God loves his elect people or willed to reconcile them to himself. Rather, it is because God loves his elect people and willed to reconcile them to himself that he gave Christ in their behalf. And Christ did not enter his place as substitute or take that responsibility upon himself on his own, but Christ was called of God to bring every last one of his elect unto God according to the eternal purpose of God and by the power of God’s decree.

Second, Christ was able to make satisfaction because he is God. As God, he was able to bear and exhaust the infinite wrath of God and not be consumed. And as God, his suffering had infinite value so that he was able to pay

God what God is owed to possess the church. God himself in Christ became the surety of his elect.

Third, Christ was able to make satisfaction because he is also very man. As one who came out of the human race, he was able to stand in the place of the human beings whom God has ordained to eternal life and bear their punishment in the same human nature that has sinned.

Fourth, Christ was able to make satisfaction because in God's will to be satisfied he has appointed Christ to be a new head. If there were no connection between Christ and the elect, then there could be no substitution for the elect. But by God's decree there is both a legal connection and an organic connection between Christ as the head and the church as his body. He is the perfect representative of the elect sinner, and thus he is responsible for the fulfillment of the covenant both by obeying the will of God perfectly and by suffering the punishment that those in the covenant deserved. He is responsible for the righteousness of that covenant. He is responsible for the debt of the sins in that covenant.

Because of this headship, it must be emphasized that Christ did not die for the mere advantage or interest of his elect, but he died *in their place*. The importance of these words for the elect child of God is that it is as if I myself hung on the cross. For the saint in the old dispensation, this reality was given in a very dim picture when through *samak* he burdened with sin a creature with which he stood in a close and personal relationship.¹⁰ For the member of the Reformed church today,

it belongs to his self-examination in connection with the Lord's table "whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given him as his own, yea, *so perfectly as if he had satisfied in his own person for all his sins and fulfilled all righteousness*" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 268, emphasis added).

Finally, Christ was able to make satisfaction because, as to his person, he is the eternally begotten Son of God who came from heaven and who was not in Adam's corporation. This is required because guilt is imputed to the person; and if Christ was to be free from the responsibility of Adam's sin and worthy of a perfect and uncorrupted human nature, then he must be the head of a new corporation. That he is the eternally begotten Son of God also means that in him is all of God's pleasure. Nothing else is needed than the mediator Jesus Christ to be accepted before God.

Samak was yet another impression into the moldable substance of the old dispensation of the weighty, eternal reality of Christ, specifically of Christ the substitute of his people. Next time, I intend to harmonize the statement in Leviticus 1:4 that the sacrifice was accepted to make atonement for the sinner with scripture's testimony in Hebrews 10:4 that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."

—LB

10 For the exposition of this idea, see the previous article in this series: Luke Bomers, "Sacrifices (6): Sacrificial Material," *Sword and Shield* 5, no. 7 (December 2024): 15–20.

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

THE KNOWLEDGE OF MAN (1): WALKING WITH GOD IN PARADISE

Introduction

There are many conceptions about man. Some say that man is divine—that is, God is in man, and man grows and develops in the world until he becomes conscious that he is divine like God. By the many good things man has done, he eventually will be equal to God, his creator. But man's deeds fail him, and he cannot avail equality with God.

Others say that man is powerful. They say that man can change God's determinate counsel because, after all, God is somehow dependent upon the works of man. Man is endowed with sovereignty—that is, with authoritative freedom to determine his past, present, and future life. Man's pinnacle comes close to God's sovereign power and determination. People often set forth God as someone who assists man, so that man might achieve his earthly and heavenly purposes. Many preachers present God as one who is dependent upon what man must do and will do in this life, and thus God must adapt his will and determination to man's will. Man then will remain motivated to do more and more, and hence man will receive the reward of his labors.

Worse yet, people make man to be a spoiled brat who is asked to accept the gift of eternal life. They present God at the door, knocking on the hard and ancient heart of man, waiting for man to open his heart and to accept all God's gifts. God begs and throws himself at the mercy of man so that the will of God will become effective. Man will be saved if he accepts God's gift of eternal life. And man will be blessed if he actively does his part to receive God's blessings.

Oh, what a wonderful man! If only he could realize his worth, this world would surely become a more glorious place in which to live than the first world of Adam

and Noah. If man could realize how powerful and active he is, the world would need no Christ for salvation and blessings.

In this series I intend to give the reader an evaluation of man. In Reformed dogmatics the study of man is traditionally called *anthropology*, a compound term from the Greek words *ἄνθρωπος* (*anthrōpos*, which means *man*) and *λογία* (*logia*, which means *studies*, but it also means *oracles* or *words* at its ancient root). *Anthropology* simply means *the study of man*.

However, the term *study of man* does not convey the purpose of this series. To study man is to begin and end with man and primarily to acquire decent information about man. That is not my intention. Nor do I want to measure man by merely natural senses (that is, the science of anthropology).

Rather, I intend to present man as one *who is nothing* in relationship to God, who is the absolute and eternal being in comparison to man. The important point is that man is not to be conceived exclusively or even primarily with his humanity. Any true conception of man must always be placed against who and what God is, for God is the essential principle (*principium essendi*) of all saving knowledge. God is self-sufficient to reveal all knowledge, and out of him flows every point of doctrine, for example, the knowledge of man. And God uses knowledge to build up and save the church and to leave the reprobate wicked without excuse.

Thus a right treatment of man begins with the presupposition that God is God and that man is nothing but dust. Man, though exalted above the creation, organically originated from the creative counsel of God. God creatively called everything in heaven and earth into existence. By taking counsel with himself, thus proving his

self-sufficiency, or aseity, God created man in God's own image. God created man in distinction from himself, for an image is only a resemblance of the original. Man was not equal to God nor an independent being apart from God. Man was god in terms of whose image he bore, but man was and is not God. Consequently, God mocked man when man boastfully thought that he could be equal to God: "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). Man despised the distinction God had put between himself and his creatures. Man despised the inconceivable and infinite chasm between God and his creatures. But God will never let a mere creature rob him of his glory. God has proven that in all history, and he will prove that ultimately at the appearing of Jesus Christ as the Son of man—the only man who has the right of divine majesty and glory. A mere man surely will be mocked to dust and even to hell, where all despisers of God's glory belong.

Man must keep in mind that he did not exist until God worked out his own counsel. Man's existence depends on God. Man is nothing, and forever he will be dependent on God alone. But man's consciousness of himself should intertwine properly with the revelation of God in God's essence, persons, perfections, and works. Man never can know himself unless he attends closely to his distinction from God. And in distinction from God, man is nothing, while God is everything. Man's whole being can be explained only from the viewpoint of who God is. John Calvin wrote, "We must infer that man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty."¹

Moreover, this series will not be a mere study of man, for I want to adopt the ancient meaning of *logia*, that is, *oracles* or *words*. In the Greek, *logia* is etymologically related to *λόγος* (*logos*), which means *word*. God as the covenant God actively speaks and reveals himself as the Word. It is the harmonious activity of the three persons of the Trinity constantly to reveal themselves within the one essence of Jehovah. *They* are the holy family of *three* who coexist in one divine essence, among which persons there are no secret things, but there is perfect friendship. The covenant fellowship of the three with each other is permeated by divine love and the gracious speech of Jehovah. And according to his counsel, God determined to reveal himself—but not without a mediator—to his creatures in a creaturely manner, while eternally remaining the absolute, incomprehensible, infinite, and lofty one. Only when God speaks to his creatures does he become knowable. Regarding the creaturely manner of God's

speaking to us, Calvin likened this activity of God to a nurse's speaking with a lisp to an infant.²

Undoubtedly, Jesus Christ, the exact image of God and the mediator of the covenant, "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself" (Phil. 2:7–8). Jesus Christ was the visible appearing of God in a creaturely manner, that is, in human flesh, in which he could be perceived through the natural senses (1 John 1:1–3). Such a great wonder it is that a pure spirit took upon himself a visible, finite form to reveal and manifest himself to visible, finite creatures. God spoke to us with a lisp through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, evidence of his divinity should never be slighted.

Jesus Christ is central in this revelation of God, for Christ is the *Logos*, *the* eternal Word of God, the natural speech of the triune God.

1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2. The same was in the beginning with God.
3. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1–3)

Moreover, "Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:20). Thus in order for this series to be edifying to the reader, I intend to present man in relationship to Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ is *the* revelation of God and *the* Word from whom we inquire everything about man and from whom we receive the knowledge of God for our salvation.

In that light, instead of a mere *study* of man, I prefer to title the series "The Knowledge of Man," that is, a knowledge that is part of God's revelation of himself. For though I intend to write something about man, the truth remains that the Word—the Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all knowledge flows (whether of man, covenant, sin, death, salvation, faith, good works, elect and reprobate angels, church, etc.)—essentially reveals the one true God. God is always the subject of revelation. Other places of theology must be explained in the light of that subject. Jesus Christ, the Word, teaches his people rightly to *know* man, so that only God is exaltedly revealed. Hence God remains faithful to supply the wise with the spiritual knowledge of their salvation. So inclined are we foolishly to begin and end with man without first seeing God in every truth of scripture. It is useless to make man

1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.1.3, 1:39.

2 Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.1, 1:121.

the beginning and end of instruction. We must see God and his Christ in every point of doctrine.

Man is nothing, and God is everything!

Walking with God in Paradise

Man—Adam (אָדָם)—was the crown of creation. Oh, how excellent was man! After God’s creation of man, God declared that all his works were “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

In response to his unknown calumniator, Calvin commented on this declaration of God. Calvin wrote,

These words “all things were very good,” were not intended to express their perfection, as if the Holy Spirit declared, that nothing was wanting to the excellence of any creature.³

Prior to this comment Calvin asserted that the “weakness” of Adam fell under that declaration of God that everything “was very good.”⁴ Adam was made perfect, but he was not without weakness. His perfection was not the highest expression of good. Adam’s perfection was not divine but creaturely; it belonged to his original rectitude but not to his perfect righteousness, which is found only in the person of Jesus Christ. Most surely, though Adam was lapsible, God was still satisfied with his creative work. That was so because God’s eternal counsel was infallibly realized in time.

Calvin further implied that God cannot be accused “of fitting man for ruin, by the weakness in which he created him.”⁵ Adam was created with a tendency to fall into sin. This is also the assertion of Herman Hoeksema, who wrote, “Adam was created lapsible.”⁶ This certainly leaves the impression that the first world as it was created in six, literal days was intended by God to perish in Adam. Indeed, it was! The world was created to be eventually made subject to vanity and to the bondage of corruption because of Adam. In God’s inscrutable wisdom, he had his goal. He always had his goal. The goal is his eternal purpose as it was established in Jesus Christ before all things. God’s goal is the glory of his name in the realization of his covenant fellowship with his people through Jesus Christ. Eden was not meant to be the culmination of the kingdom of God, although Eden had a royal king who was ordained to subdue all things to serve God, the creator. However, no amount of obedience could make Eden the culmination of all things.

That the opposite implication is very closely related to the theory of the covenant of works goes without saying. For example, Charles Hodge alluded to a notion that Adam might have attained immortality and eternal life on the condition of perfect obedience.⁷

Man as he walked and lived with God in paradise can be perceived only eschatologically. What is the end of all things? Was paradise ordained to remain forever? Neither Adam nor Eden was the culmination of all things. Adam was bound, according to the eternal counsel of God, to fall and to serve as a type of Christ. Adam was not the last Adam; Jesus Christ is. Adam was not the quickening spirit; Jesus Christ is (1 Cor. 15:45).

This is the reason that Adam was immediately confronted by the reality of the antithesis. Adam was confronted by what is not the will of God. Undoubtedly, Adam’s immediate exposure to the antithesis was to manifest what was lacking in his perfection. The probationary law was not intended to motivate Adam with his own power and capability to obey God, so that as a consequence of Adam’s active obedience he would receive the reward of eternal life. Rather, the law was spoken to declare what the will of God is and what it is not.

Moreover, the law was there to create an antithesis. The law is the knowledge of sin. Oh, yes, Adam had not yet sinned and transgressed when the law was given. He was not yet polluted by sin and found guilty of it. But by that law Adam was taught what was the direct opposite of the will of God. That alone was the source of the knowledge of sin for Adam. There he was confronted immediately by the antithesis. The thesis for Adam was to love his God with all his being as Adam was the servant-friend of God. The antithesis is anything that is in direct opposition to God’s will, which in principle is to hate God and become his enemy.

God is pure thesis. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). He is the implication of all perfections. He is pure light and the absolute being. Rev. Marinus Schipper explained the life of God this way:

It should be clearly understood that in God himself there is no antithesis. Though the antithesis is of Him, it is not in Him. God is pure thesis. The word “antithesis,” as any good dictionary will tell you, is composed of two words: *anti* and *thesis*.

3 *Calvin on Secret Providence*, trans. James Lillie (New York: Robert Carter, 1840), 26, <https://ia801603.us.archive.org/22/items/calvinonsecretp00calv/calvinonsecretp00calv.pdf>.

4 *Calvin on Secret Providence*, 25.

5 *Calvin on Secret Providence*, 36.

6 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 1:302.

7 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), 2:118–20. Notice page 118: “Sometimes it is called the covenant of works, because works were conditions on which that promise was suspended, and because it is thus distinguished from the new covenant which promises life on condition of faith... The life thus promised included the happy, holy, and immortal existence of the soul and body.”

Anti means, against. *Thesis* comes from a Greek word meaning: to place or set. Thesis, therefore, is that which is put, or set; while antithesis is that which opposes that which is set. Now, God is, as we said, the thesis. He is light, and there is no darkness in him. He is the truth, and there is no lie in him. He is righteousness, and there is no unrighteousness in him. God never, from this point of view, suffers opposition, experiences contrary winds, has any antithesis in himself. If there is any antithesis, and there is, he creates it. Of this he speaks in Isaiah 45:7: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things.” See also Amos 3:6. God willed and created the darkness that he might forever hate it; and on the other hand, he willed to reveal all the glory of his thetical being on the dark background of sin and evil and so creates the darkness to be a servant.

And the truth is that God also put the thesis in his people by his grace. And so he commands them to live thetically in every department of life as lights in the world of darkness.⁸

The thesis that God puts in his people is his law. Adam had the living will of God in his heart; but as Adam lived and walked with God in paradise, Adam also had to hear God’s will, so that by hearing he might be admonished to live thetically in the way of righteousness and antithetically as he was confronted with the knowledge of sin.

As a psychosomatic, personal being, man is a rational, moral creature. And by the breath of life, he became a living soul—that is, he was created as one physical-psychical being. He was both a physical and a spiritual being. Therefore, he consciously enjoyed fellowship with God in paradise. He actively walked with God and talked to him. Endowed with knowledge, Adam consciously responded to God as a result of God’s harmonious fellowship with Adam. Moreover, because within the covenant there are life and energies, Adam had all the liberty to serve God and him alone. It would thus be seen that Adam’s obedience was more directed to God than to serve Adam’s own good. Even with the knowledge of sin, Adam had the freedom to fulfill his service and pay homage to God with all his being. To clarify, Adam’s freedom did not consist primarily in his choosing whether to sin or not. His freedom was always to be in harmony with God’s will. It was spontaneous for Adam to serve God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. Adam had the freedom to align himself perfectly with the will of God. Adam also had the freedom not to sin. He was able not to sin (*posse non peccare*).

But this ability not to sin, dear reader, was not enough for Adam to attain a higher level of righteousness. No matter how able Adam was to fulfill the probationary law and to live thetically according to God’s will and actively to choose not to sin, that goodness of man was not the highest good. This evidently was true when the probationary law was given to Adam. The giving of the law was an allusion of God that Adam was lapsible. If he were not, then the command would have had to be in only a positive form. But the command was also given negatively to check Adam’s lapsible nature, to bring him from whence he had been taken—from the dust. The command was to imbed in Adam’s consciousness the reality of the “weakness” in his nature, as Calvin said, to impress in Adam’s mind and heart that he was not the highest expression of good. The highest expression of good was neither Adam nor the paradise in which he lived. He was in constant danger, for he was only a *man*. Danger was imminent as long as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in paradise and in sight. Being *posse non peccare* was not enough. He needed to be perfect—that is, he needed a rectitude that by nature was impossible to lose, a righteousness that by nature was in perfect harmony with the nature of God, who is the implication of all perfections. That was impossible. Adam was just a man by nature and had creaturely perfections. Through Adam God reflected his divine perfections, but the truth remains that Adam had just a creaturely reflection of God’s perfections. With Adam it was impossible to attain a higher righteousness. He was hopeless to attain a more blissful life with God. All belonged to the earth no matter how well Adam performed perfect obedience.

But for the last Adam, Jesus Christ, it is possible to attain the highest good. He is the mediator, who is not only a perfectly righteous man but who is also fully God. *Jesus Christ cannot sin*, unlike the first Adam. Jesus Christ can attain a higher level of rectitude than what was given to Adam in paradise. Because Jesus Christ is the end of all things, he is the ultimate Adam. And ultimately, Jesus Christ is God himself.

Regarding the initial evaluation of man when he was still walking with God in paradise, it is thus evident how insufficient man was in paradise. Any hope then should never be fixed on man, who in himself could not pass from this earth into heavenly glory. He needed someone outside himself to pass from this earth into heavenly glory. And that need could only be realized in the way of sin.

Man *had* to sin. This aspect of the truth I plan to treat next time.

—JP

8 Marinus Schipper, “The Antithesis,” *Standard Bearer* 36, no. 21 (September 15, 1960): 499.

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

VALIANT

The church needs valiant men. The prayer of the church is that God will give her such men.

The term *valiant* is very old, and while rarely used today, it has great significance and relevance for the church in every age. Broadly in the world, God works valiance in men to advance his cause and kingdom as men rise to power and fall and as kingdoms and nations are shaped and destroyed. Valiance serves the eternal decree of God in election and reprobation. In the church valiance is a characteristic of the believer, a fruit of faith, a gift, worked by the Holy Spirit for God's cause, which cause is his own glory as he brings to pass the fulfillment of his covenant promise in Christ.

It is correct and good to say that the church needs valiant men, for to say that the church needs valiant men is to say that she must have men of faith, men who love the Lord. It is to understand that valiance is a demonstration of faith and evidence of God's power and work in the church. It is to acknowledge that the church has enemies and that the believer will be engaged in battle. The church must be marked by valiant men, women, and children, and if she does not have such members, that is the evidence of God's work of hardening them against his word and a lack of faith.

We do not trust in valiant men, but we trust in the God of the valiant.

Definition

A simple online search for the meaning of *valiant* reveals some variation in wording but a common theme. *Valiant* is an adjective that describes a person "possessing or acting with bravery or boldness," or *valiant* describes the acts themselves as those "marked by, exhibiting, or carried out with courage or determination," especially in the face of impossible, difficult, and treacherous circumstances. Synonyms of *valiant* help to round out our understanding of the meaning and sense of the word, a few of those being brave, courageous, daring, heroic, determined, dauntless, manful, fearless, lionhearted, and intrepid. *Valiant's* etymology is that the word is "borrowed from Anglo-French

vaillant 'worthy, strong, courageous,' from present participle of *valer* 'to be of worth,' going back to Latin *valēre* 'to have strength, be well.'"¹

Valiant is a biblical term, and a second online search reveals that

"Valiant" in the Old Testament is for the most part the translation of *chayil*, "power," or "might," and is applied to the courageous and to men of war ("mighty men of valor"), as in 1 Samuel 14:52; 31:12; 2 Samuel 11:16, etc.; in some passages *ben chayil*, "a son of might" (Judges 21:10; 1 Samuel 18:17; 2 Samuel 2:7, etc.). A few other Hebrew words (*gibbor*, etc.) are thus rendered. In the New Testament the word occurs once in the King James Version (Hebrews 11:34, "valiant in fight"; the Revised Version (British and American) "mighty in war"). "Valiantly" is the translation of the same Hebrew word (Numbers 24:18; Psalms 60:12, etc.); in one case in the King James Version of *chazaq* (1 Chronicles 19:13, the American Standard Revised Version "play the man," the English Revised Version "men"). In some instances the Revised Version (British and American) has variations, as "man of valor" for "valiant man" (1 Samuel 16:18), "valiant" for "strong" (1 Chronicles 26:7,9; Jeremiah 48:14, etc.).²

A Demonstration of Faith

In service of the flesh, it is entirely natural to be valiant. This valiance manifests differently from person to person, but universally men are valiant for their own causes. God has worked out his decree throughout history by working various and sundry acts of valiance in the smallest of arenas to the largest of global stages. But in service of God, it is entirely unnatural to be valiant. The flesh fights hard against the work of the Holy Spirit to make God's people valiant for his cause and kingdom. Miraculously and astonishingly, as surely as God works faith in the elect, he also works valiance in the church.

1 Merriam-Webster Online, s.v. "valiant," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/valiant>.

2 International Standard Bible Encyclopedia Online, s.v. "valiant, valiantly," <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/valiant-valiantly>.

It must be established at the outset that the valiance of the believer is a fruit of faith. Valiance is a gift of God that serves the Lord's cause and glory, and valiance is not unto any other blessing of salvation. God grants to his people the great privilege of partaking in his battles and his cause. This is established by the elect being made part of Christ, their head, in whom they have all the blessings of salvation. Valiance is wholly of God's power: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

God did not need the Israelites to be valiant in order to give them victories over the nations. The battles did not rest on Israel's valiance. God did not give to the Israelites the land of Canaan by their participation in the battles of the Lord against his enemies. The Israelites did not experience the spiritual reality of peace with God and rest in the land because of or in the way of their fighting in God's battles.

God declared to his church this truth in 2 Chronicles 20:15–17. Jahaziel said,

15. Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.
16. To morrow, go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel.
17. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.

Valiance is a gift and a gracious miracle that is evidence of God's saving power in the lives of his people. God loved his people from eternity in Christ; God ingrafted them into Christ by faith; and by that faith God produces a love for himself in their hearts. Since they are made of God's party, God continues to work in his people, and they are God-lovers.

That continual act of God produces many different and beautiful fruits, including an unworldly valiance. When spiritual valiance is manifested in the people of God, there also is displayed the Holy Spirit's work of faith, and Christ himself is there. The good news is that their unbelief, weakness, and wickedness are forgiven in Christ, and they rest on his perfect valiance and trust Christ's perfect service in the battles of his Father.

There is no self-willed, self-generated valiance that is made to be a possibility by an enabling act of God in man, for valiance is wholly, from beginning to end, the work and act of the Holy Spirit.

2. By whom [Jesus Christ] also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
3. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
4. And patience, experience; and experience, hope:
5. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (Rom. 5:2–5)

God's Plan and Purpose

God communicated to the church his plan and purpose when he made the covenantal, mother promise of Genesis 3:15: "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." Woven within that promise is the way that God will carry out his promise—in that great antithetical battle between God himself and the devil. In that promise God instructs the church as to who is her enemy—the devil and his seed. God also teaches what is the fulfillment of that promise—Christ's victory over the devil and the elect church's victory in Christ. All of God's working of valiance in the believer is also in service of his eternally decreed plan and purpose.

Valiant David

While the entire scriptures are full of examples, valiance is displayed beautifully for the church in the life and walk of David and his mighty men. The spiritual state of the nation of Israel prior to David's rule was shocking in its carnality and lack of faith. The people had chosen carnal Saul to be their king, and they had rejected and forgotten God's stated purpose and promise for the nation:

24. I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people.
26. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine. (Lev. 20:24, 26)

This promise had been repeated throughout the generations and was again delivered to Joshua before the Israelites entered Canaan:

9. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.
10. Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people saying,

13. Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land...
14. Ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them;
15. Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed the land which the LORD your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it. (Josh. 1:9–10, 13–15)

The promise of God for the land clearly included God's word that he would drive out the nations that were in the land, which nations and peoples were God's enemies. This is the reality of God's decree for his people throughout every age, that by being made God's friends, they are at war with God's enemies. The Israelites were not to mix themselves with the nations around them or become entangled with those nations' gods.

By the time of King Saul's rule, the nation that had begun well under Joshua was carnal; the people were more interested in earthly peace and prosperity than in any battle of the Lord's. They supported and strengthened the hand of Saul as he hunted David, whose cause was the Lord's. They wanted nothing to do with the valiant and warring David. They fought against him, undermined his cause, called him names, supported Saul's obsession with killing David, and at best played at neutrality. They were carnal and wanted nothing to do with God's battles. They were not valiant for anything but their own causes.

Valiant Men

God in his mercy called many of the faithful out of Israel to go to David and gathered unto David many

mighty men, helpers of the war. They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow...men of might, and men of war fit for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as the roes upon the mountains...men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment...such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, which could keep rank: they were not of double heart. (1 Chron. 12:1–2, 8, 32–33)

Those men, led by David, agreed with God in God's cause. They believed that God would fulfill his promise

to give them the land of Canaan, that he would defeat his enemies. Knowing that God's salvation lay in the kingdom established with David, out of thankfulness to God for his salvation, they were valiant for God's cause. Those men understood that they could not make alliances and establish ties with the enemies of God, knowing that diplomacy and smooth words were not included in God's prescription. God's instruction in the principles of spiritual warfare and the declaration of his promise lived in their hearts; by his Spirit they made judgments in all these matters; and they knew what they ought to do. They loved God and so lived in that love that when God told them to go to war, they received that word and trusted that word. That was the act of God himself to work faith in the hearts of those men, granting them bravery to face battles against impossible odds and against powerful enemies.

Valiant!

The Victory

There was no debate on whether David and his mighty men would have the victory. David and his mighty men knew that God's cause and promise was to give them the land of Canaan, and they believed God's victory declaration: "The LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deut. 20:4). In the earthly tableau David and his mighty men saw the spiritual reality of promised victory in Christ. All around them were examples of worldly wisdom and political expediency. Alliances, diplomatic maneuverings, marriages, and threats of violence were all the carnal tools the nations employed in their own pursuits of power. However, David's mighty men loved the Lord; and walking by faith, believing in the promise, they were aligned to David and fought with David. They fought valiantly against God's enemies, trusted that God's victory was sure, rejected carnal weaponry, and obeyed God's command. Those were unnatural acts of faith that found their source and power in God himself.

Some men refused to fight, would not be aligned with David, and turned back from the battle. That too was according to God's eternal decree of election and reprobation. God did not work valiance in all men, not even all who were part of the nation of Israel. That lack of valiance was a lack of faith; it was unbelief.

That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, *For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world* (Acts 15:18). *Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will* (Eph. 1:11). According to which decree He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the

non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which, though men of perverse, impure and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation. (Canons of Dordt 1.6, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 156)

Scripture testifies that God indeed carried out his decree and established his kingdom with David by destroying the nations that were in Canaan. God glorified himself as he declared his victory over the wicked and as he gave the land of Canaan to the nation of Israel.

Carnal Valiance

There is a test that must be applied to judge valiance. Believers are called to judge whether what they observe is carnal or spiritual. There must be a spiritual judgment made because the children of God can be valiant for their own causes, and they must judge themselves. The church and individual believers must also make judgments within the body, since wicked men are always present both inside and outside the church, and they cleverly cover their carnality with pious mantles in order to deceive. Valiant men are leaders of the people; they can be brave, bold, and decisive. They can appear as angels of light, and their very real and natural valiance is alluring to the church because she often seeks to put her trust in men. Valiance itself is not the test of a man. “They bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD” (Jer. 9:3).

Valiance as a fruit of faith and a gift of God always serves God’s truth; valiance is aligned with God’s word and the creeds and can be tested by those standards. “Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth” (Ps. 60:4). “We will rejoice in thy salvation, and in the name of our God we will set up our banners” (20:5). “As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever” (Isa. 59:21). This is the valiance that is spiritual; it has no source in man at all and does not give glory to men.

In contrast, the valiance that seeks her own glory will always elevate man and his carnal purposes and will be at

variance with the glory and kingdom of God. Somewhere and at some point, the words and acts of carnal valiance are revealed and are to be judged.

Relevance for Today

God’s word is still true; the sameness of God’s purpose is immutable. His purpose to realize the kingdom of heaven in Christ will never change, and he carries out that cause as he conducts the fierce, already victorious battle against the devil. God also carries out his decree of election and reprobation today in the same way that he did in the time of David. God draws his people to himself and aligns them with his will and work and makes valiant his church. His people know the Lord; they know his cause; they know his way; and they know his enemies. God’s people confess, “Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies” (Ps. 108:13). God’s people love God’s goodness and justice and mercy, and they rejoice in the battle!

How unnatural!

How glorious!

Take heart and remember that after Hezekiah had “set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city,” he spoke “comfortably to them,” saying,

7. Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him:
8. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. (2 Chron. 32:6–8)

And also remember Jeremiah 17:5–8:

5. Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.
6. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.
7. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.
8. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

—Ashley Cleveland

THE MINOR CONFESSIONS (3): THE NICENE CREED

Introduction

The Nicene Creed, or the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, is the product of the Council of Nicaea, held in the year AD 325. There have been many church councils held since that time. However, I daresay that there have been few church councils that have left such an impact on the trajectory of the Christian church as the Council of Nicaea. The Council of Nicaea ranks among the greatest ecclesiastical assemblies since the time of the Jerusalem Council to the Synod of Dordrecht (1618–19).

Many have described the events of Nicaea as a victorious triumph of the Christian faith. That is a very apt description of the event that was the Council of Nicaea. It is fitting that we consider that the main issue of debate around the time of the council concerned the deity of Christ. It is fitting for us because there is no greater consideration in all the world than the identity of Jesus Christ. We considered this last time in connection with the Apostles' Creed. Christ's question "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matt. 16:13) is the most important question that confronts the entire world.

The truth of the salvation of mankind was at stake at the Council of Nicaea. Christ's person and his work are inseparably connected. This was the heavenly gospel message of the angel, that his name should be called Jesus, "For he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Man cannot save himself. God alone must save man—so utterly hopeless is man's condition by nature. For Christ to be the savior, he must be both fully man *and* fully God.

Additionally, the deity of Christ is a fitting topic for us to consider because just as there was no room for Jesus in the inn, so also there is no room for such a fiery and intense controversy in the church world today, especially over doctrinal matters. We live in a very affluent age. We have not yet suffered unto blood. And yet present at the council were men who bore visible marks of the Great Persecution, which had lasted for nearly a decade and was fresh in the minds of many confessors. Men came to the council with severed body parts, gouged eyes, lacerations, and burn marks from their wicked tormentors.

There was a tremendous gulf between truth and lie present at the Council of Nicaea. Despite the efforts of an emperor, who encouraged the council in whatever way he saw the majority would unanimously agree to for the sake of merely earthly peace, and despite the cunning craftiness of some bishops to disguise their unbelief of the truth beneath pious-sounding confessions, the orthodox refused to settle for anything less than a confession that would leave the opponents of the truth unable to subscribe to it honestly. What resulted was a faithful confession of the deity of Jesus Christ. This can only be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ promised to send, who guides his people into all the truth (John 16:13).

I mention all this by way of introduction with the intention that the reader not become lost in the history. There is some fascinating and gripping information available about the history of the council that I will not discuss in this article. However, I will remark on the key events and characters of the history as they serve the purpose of the article, which is to reflect on the Nicene Creed and its place among the minor confessions.

A Brief History

As I briefly mentioned, there were men present at the Council of Nicaea in 325 who bore visible marks of their sufferings at the hands of their persecutors. While Christians in the Roman Empire occasionally experienced brief periods of respite, often they were hunted down and persecuted on account of their confessions of Jesus Christ. This came to a head in what became known as the Great Persecution. Churches were destroyed, and Bibles were burned. If we were to measure the Great Persecution in terms of cruelty and martyrdom, we must conclude that this period, which lasted just short of a decade (c. 303–11), far surpassed anything that had been experienced by the Christian church up to that point. The persecution was a systematic effort to suppress or to eradicate entirely the perceived threat of Christianity within the Roman Empire. The persecution ended in 311 when Emperor Galerius begrudgingly issued an edict that tolerated the Christians' assemblies.

Roman Emperor Constantine is known for being the first emperor to enter the ecclesiastical affairs of Christianity. After a somewhat controversial and wonderful conversion experience on the field of battle, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan (313), which declared that the Christian religion not only ought to be tolerated, but that Christianity would be given equal rights and position with that of the pagan religions within the empire. This is one of the earliest examples in the new dispensation of a blurring of the line of separation between the church and the state. This ultimately created an interesting setting for the Council of Nicaea.

Further, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Arian controversy, which became the main catalyst for the council and the production of the Nicene Creed. The great question for some three hundred years in the Christian church was whether Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was indeed very God with the Father.¹ Arianism, named after Arius, an Alexandrian presbyter in Antioch, answered the question by teaching that Christ, although the creator of the world, was a creature of God, even the highest of all created reality, somewhat God-like, but not actually divine.² This teaching sparked an intense and bitter controversy, the two main opponents of which were Arius and Alexander, the chief bishop of Alexandria. Alexander taught the eternal generation of Jesus Christ and deduced from it the doctrine of *homoousios*, or the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. *Homoousios* is a combination of two Greek words and means *of the same essence or substance*. The controversy broke out about 318 or 320. The result in 321 was that a council of one hundred Egyptian and Libyan bishops at Alexandria deposed and excommunicated Arius and his followers for their views.

While Arius sought to proliferate his views in other parts of the empire, Alexander was firm in his convictions and sent letters to warn the churches against the apostates. Church historian Philip Schaff describes the Arian controversy very vividly when he writes,

Bishop rose against bishop, and province against province. The controversy soon involved, through the importance of the subject and the zeal of the

parties, the entire church, and transformed the Christian East into a theological battle-field.³

News of the controversy reached the throne room of Emperor Constantine, who was alarmed by all the unrest and felt it necessary, probably under the advice of bishops who were his friends, to call a council of bishops to meet at Nicaea in the hope of restoring peace to his realm. Constantine sent out invitations to all the bishops of the empire, summoning them to appear at the council and guaranteeing that they would be reimbursed from the public treasury for their travel and residency expenses.

Most of the Eastern provinces were strongly represented at the council. Among the members present were Alexander of Alexandria and his friend and archdeacon Athanasius (a young man who rivaled the eldest members

God of God. Light of Light.
True God of true God. Begotten,
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of the council in zeal, intellect, and eloquence and gave promise as the future leader of the orthodox party). The council began with a brief greeting from one of the bishops, followed by an address from Constantine, who oversaw the affairs of the council. From thence the council began to conduct its work. The council was divided into three parties: the orthodox majority, which firmly held to the

deity of Christ, being headed by Alexander of Alexandria; the Arians, who formed the heretical minority; and the semi-Arians, who attempted to be a bridge between the two parties. A bishop named Eusebius of Caesarea was one of the leading figures in the semi-Arian faction.

The Arians were the first ones to propose a creed, which was met with tremendous disapproval and was publicly torn to pieces. Most of the men who had signed the Arian document had seen the proverbial handwriting on the wall, and they abandoned the cause of the Arians, leaving only Theonas and Secundus, both of Egypt, in the Arian minority.

Eusebius, a friend of the emperor, had proposed an ancient Palestinian confession, which was like the future Nicene Creed, acknowledging the divinity of Christ but avoiding the crucial term *homoousios*. Unsurprisingly, this confession had been approved already by the emperor, who was interested mainly in producing a confession that all the delegates could agree to unanimously for the sake

1 B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 30.

2 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity, A.D. 311–600* (Broken Arrow, OK: Vision for Maximum Impact LLC, 2017), 368.

3 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:369.

of peace. However, the men in the orthodox party were rightly suspicious of this confession and were unflinching in their insistence on a creed that included the expression *homoousios*, which the Arians despised and declared to be unscriptural.

Eventually, there was a creed produced. This creed was immediately subscribed to by almost all the bishops present at the council, including Eusebius (with some reluctance). This was the first instance of such signing of a document in the Christian church. Theonas and Secundus refused to sign and were banished along with Arius to Illyria. Arius' books were burned, and he and his followers were branded as enemies of Christianity. Constantine viewed the first edition of the Nicene Creed as a product of "divine inspiration," while many others viewed the outcome of the council as a necessary victory over against every heresy.

Unfortunately, the battle was far from over. While the outcome of the council was of tremendous importance in preserving the truth, nevertheless in many ways it was merely a triumph in outward appearance. Alas, there were bishops who subscribed to the Nicene Creed who only reluctantly received the confession of *homoousios*. Under the influence of Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantine's sister Constantia, and a somewhat obscure confession by Arius, Constantine experienced a change of mind about Arius and recalled him from exile. It became evident then that Constantine understood little of the seriousness of the issue. Arius was acquitted of all charges of heresy and was to be received back into the fellowship of the church at Constantinople.

During this time Alexander of Alexandria died (April 328), leaving behind a vacancy in the office of chief bishop of Alexandria, which vacancy was assumed by the young Athanasius. Athanasius refused to restore Arius to his former position. Thus Athanasius was condemned and deposed by two Arian councils for "false accusations" and sent away by the emperor into exile in Gaul in 336. That same year Arius suddenly died. While Athanasius was later recalled from his exile, he was again deposed. This pattern of being deposed, exiled, and then recalled from exile became a recurring pattern in the life of Athanasius and many other bishops. So-called orthodox and Arian emperors rose to the throne, appearing to change the tides of the controversy repeatedly. At times the cause of the truth appeared triumphant, and at other times the cause of the truth appeared very small.

The next significant event in this brief history was the second ecumenical council in Constantinople (381), where the original Nicene Creed was improved with a

most important addition regarding the deity of the Holy Ghost. At the Council of Constantinople, Emperor Theodosius I enacted a law that all churches "should be given up to bishops who believed in the equal divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," and "the public worship of heretics was forbidden."⁴

Finally, the Western church added to the article on the procession of the Holy Ghost the words "and the Son" (*filioque*) at the Council of Toledo in 589.

Jesus Christ: Of the Same Essence with the Father

The Nicene Creed, or the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, is organized according to the biblical doctrine of the Trinity, much like the other ecumenical creeds that are included in our Reformed standards (see Belgic Confession article 9). The early church understood that the goal of all the study of Christian doctrine is the true knowledge of God.

God decreed all things in time and history with Christ and his elect church at the center. God's decree of predestination stands at the heart of all world history as the goal. Election is not some cold blueprint according to which all things just happen. Instead, election is God's living will according to which God performs all things in time and history. Election is the beating heart of the church and explains everything about her. Election explains the church's place in the world. Election explains why some men are saved and others are damned. Election explains why heresies and false doctrine ceaselessly trouble the church, for heresies must come. Election is God's eternal good will and pleasure for the salvation of certain individuals whom he loved in Jesus Christ and to whom he determined to make known the mystery of the kingdom of heaven and to realize his eternal covenant of grace in Jesus Christ unto the praise of his own glory.

The issue of Nicaea was the true and saving knowledge of God. It was the saving knowledge of God *in Jesus Christ*. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). God sovereignly used Arius as an instrument in God's hands to derive from the early church an answer to that most fundamental question of the Christian faith, who is Jesus Christ? Apart from the correct answer to that question, all future doctrinal development and, indeed, the church's very identity would be lost. With thanksgiving to God every true church confesses that she believes

in one LORD JESUS CHRIST, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before

⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:380.

all worlds, God of God; Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made, being of one essence with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. (Nicene Creed, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 11)

It is unlikely that the church today could give such a beautiful and an unmistakable testimony to the truth. Stopping for a moment to consider the creed's language, it is striking. It is beautiful. It is lovely. It is altogether spiritual. God of God. Light of Light. True God of true God. Begotten, not made. And then the heart of the Nicene Creed: Jesus Christ, "being of one essence with the Father." Not a creature of time but begotten of the Father before all worlds. Not the highest of all created reality, but the one by whom all things were made and without whom there was not anything made that was made.

The terms *person* and *essence* were confused in the early church. Oftentimes, those two terms appeared in writings and were used interchangeably to refer to *being* or *person*. The Nicene Creed helped to distinguish and give meaning to the church's terms. The Arians, however, howled that these terms were unscriptural and even condemned them as being heretical. Certainly, the church must take extreme care in her use of terminology when explaining doctrine. However, nowhere in scripture is the church prohibited from creating and using terminology to explain her doctrine. This belongs to the freedom of the church of every age to confess the truth in her own language and to harmonize the truth of the sacred scriptures in her confessions. Predestination in scripture refers simply to the doctrine of election, and yet we confess sovereign, double predestination, election and reprobation, two sides of the one eternal decree of God. Nowhere in scripture will you find the word *Trinity*, and yet we confess that God is one in being and three in persons.

It became abundantly clear at the Council of Nicaea that the opponents of the truth were not so much offended

by the words *being* and *substance* as they were with the phrase *of the same essence with the Father (homoousios)*. *Essence*, or *substance*, simply refers to all the qualities and powers that constitute a being. However, the Arians were so offended by the confession that Christ was of the same essence (*homoousios*) with the Father that they proposed their own terminology, *homoiousios*, which means *of a similar essence*. The division could not have been sharper than it was at Nicaea. Over one little letter *i*, or *iota* in the Greek, the most fundamental truth of the Christian faith was at stake. Is Christ very God, or is Christ a created being?

Athanasius warred most vehemently against the Arian heresy and insisted upon the language of the Nicene Creed because he understood the fundamental connection between the deity of Christ and man's salvation. Man's condition by nature is so utterly hopeless that only an act of God could save him. The Nicene Creed includes this idea as part of its confession when it says, "who, for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven." God must come down to us and assume our flesh in order to bear the burden of his own wrath against our sins. That this is also the Reformed understanding of the necessity of Christ's divinity is taught in Lord's Day 6 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. 17. Why must He in one person be also very God?

A. That He might, by the power of His Godhead, sustain in His human nature the burden of God's wrath; and might obtain for, and restore to us, righteousness and life. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 88)

And then consider also article 19 of the Belgic Confession:

Wherefore we confess that He [Jesus] is very God, and very man: very God by His power to conquer death; and very man that He might die for us according to the infirmity of His flesh. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 46)

Herein lies the danger of every form of conditional theology. Conditional theology turns the doctrine of the Nicene Creed on its head, teaching rather that salvation consists in God's coming down to just the right level, to where man, by an act of his free will or by his works, might lift himself from the misery into which he willfully plunged himself. This is the horrible wickedness of

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the Protestant Reformed doctrine, which teaches that in order for man to be saved, there is that which he must do, and that God cannot and may not forgive the sinner until and unless that sinner repents. Conditional theology in all its forms makes Christ something less than God and makes man something more than a sinner saved by grace alone. Man really saves himself at that point. And that is too gross a blasphemy.

The Holy Ghost: The Lord and Giver of Life

The later addition of the article regarding the deity of the Holy Ghost was a necessary addition to the Nicene Creed by the Council of Constantinople in 381. It was necessary because the article explicitly affirmed the divinity of the Holy Spirit as coequal and coeternal God with the Father and the Son, thus rounding out the doctrine of the Trinity. This addition was a necessary response to a rising heresy called Macedonianism. Macedonians, otherwise known as Pneumatomachians (spirit fighters), believed that the Holy Spirit was a creation of the Son and was subordinate to the Father and the Son. Besides the fact that this false doctrine corrupted the entire economy or organization of the Trinity, which teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, the significance of this addition to the creed was also to teach the personality of the Spirit as “the Lord and Giver of life.”

The Spirit is the Lord and Giver of life as the third person of the Holy Trinity. The Spirit is the very life of the triune God as that life is a life of covenant fellowship and friendship. Life in God does not exist in a vacuum but is the most intimate life of living communion between the

lover and the beloved. It is the life of eternally begetting and eternally being begotten. The Spirit is the life that is generated from the Father to the Son and reciprocated back to the Father. Apart from the Spirit, life in God is an impossibility.

Life for the creature is to be taken into that covenant life of God. Life is to know God and to have and enjoy fellowship with him. It is a life in which men and women are consecrated with the entirety of their beings, with all their qualities and powers, to the glory of God. Since this is impossible for man by nature, God the Holy Spirit must give that to a man by uniting him with Jesus Christ by a true faith, thus making him a partaker of all Christ’s riches and gifts.

The Filioque

Filioque is a Latin term that was added to the Nicene Creed by the Western church at the Council of Toledo in 589. *Filioque*, a combination of two Latin words meaning *and the Son*, was added to the confession of the Holy Spirit, who “proceeds from the Father *and the Son*.” Originally, I had intended to write more about the addition of *filioque* by the Council of Toledo. I am currently making a note to discuss this further, perhaps as part of an introduction to the Athanasian Creed, which also alludes to the double procession of the Holy Spirit. However, it is important to note that the addition of this phrase to the Nicene Creed became a major source of contention between Eastern and Western Christianity and is often charged with being one of the key factors that led to the Great Schism between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches (1054). Until next time, the Lord willing.

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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

*Thou therefore, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen:
be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah. — Psalm 59:5*

The historical occasion of this psalm is stated in the title. Saul's soldiers surround the house of David to kill him. Saul had made it the official policy of the kingdom that David must die. Jonathan had confronted Saul, and Saul swore an oath that David would not die. Profanely, Saul went back on his oath, and now Saul's evil dogs surround David's house to carry out Saul's orders. There appears to be no way out!

And God seems to sleep! Does he not see? Does he not hear? Does he have no sense of urgency as the reprobate enemies of his beloved David assault him? The enemies even encourage themselves in their plots, so that no one hears their proud boasts and no one will avenge their evil deeds.

Awake, O Jehovah, God of hosts, the God of Israel! Jehovah, the God of hosts, is the triune God of the covenant before whom all creatures, even the enemies of his covenant, are but soldiers in his army who do his pleasure and carry out his will. The God of Israel is the sovereign God of election who of one race of men has determined two kinds of people. God loves his elect and appointed them to salvation in Christ, the elect one. And God hates the reprobate and appointed them to destruction. Between those two peoples and those two kingdoms, God placed an antithesis, so that there is hatred between Christ and Belial and between the elect and the reprobate.

Awake, O Jehovah! Awake to visit all the heathen! Strange prayer that is. David prays that Jehovah of hosts will judge all the nations. But were the nations at this time arrayed against David? Was it not Saul and the reprobate enemies of David within Israel who threatened him? Yes, but that opposition of Saul was just one part of the whole opposition of the heathen nations against God and his kingdom all history long, which will culminate in the antichrist, who will make himself lord of all the nations and oppose God and his Christ. So Christ in his type pleads the common cause of the church. Always the church in history, a hut in a garden of cucumbers and a besieged city, finds herself threatened by the nations, and her existence in the world seems to hang by a thread.

Awake, O Jehovah, to visit with judgment those reprobate enemies represented in the nations. And if God is judge of all the nations, then how much more is he not judge in his church when the enemies take the form of false and profane brethren, whose mouths are full of proud lies and cursing and who go back on their oaths and professions of the truth?

Awake, O Jehovah, and be not merciful to any wicked transgressors! David's prayer! Christ's prayer! A prayer for the salvation of God's church in the destruction of the reprobate enemies of that church. For the defense of his covenant, Jehovah will shake himself out of his apparent slumber like a mighty man, and he will have his enemies in derision. He will laugh at them.

Yes, that was the cross and resurrection. By the skin of his teeth, David escaped Saul. Christ delivered up himself to the death of the cross. There Jehovah was merciful to his people and punished their sins in his Son, and there God crushed decisively the wicked enemies of his covenant, who had thought to destroy the Lord's anointed at the cross. And on Sunday morning Jehovah had them in derision. Such he does always for his church. He shows no mercy to the enemies of his people, and Christ will appear to put his enemies to an end finally.

—NJL