

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

SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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

Deuteronomy 33:29

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CONTENTS

3 **MEDITATION**
FORSAKEN OF GOD
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

7 **EDITORIAL**
UNION WITH CHRIST (6):
THE CALLING CONTINUED
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

15 **FROM THE EDITOR**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak

16 **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**
SET FOR A DEFENSE
Rev. Tyler D. Ophoff

24 **OUR DOCTRINE**
SACRIFICES (8): SHADOW-ATONEMENT
Rev. Luke Bomers

29 **DRY MORSEL**
THE KNOWLEDGE OF MAN (2):
EXPELLED FROM PARADISE
Rev. Jeremiah Pascual

34 **RUNNING FOOTMEN**
DRAGGING THE ERROR
OF PELAGIUS OUT OF HELL
Caleb Ophoff

40 **FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL**
Rev. Nathan J. Langerak



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FORSAKEN OF GOD

*Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.
And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?
that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? — Matthew 27:45–47*

Darkness! In the beginning all was dark when the Spirit brooded upon the face of the deep. And God said, “Let there be light,” and light was. He is the God who causes the light to stand out from the darkness, for he is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Thus the state of things in the beginning is but a picture of our salvation. For man is darkness. He became darkness in Adam. Such is the depth of that darkness that the Light of the world shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not. There must be a miracle to bring light out of the darkness that man became in Adam. God must enter into the darkness, so that by the wonder of grace he brings light out of darkness.

But what shall we say about the darkness at the cross of Calvary?

There is the darkness of night, but it is punctuated by the twinkling stars and the soft shimmer of the moon. The eyes can become accustomed to even the deepest night, and the animals of the night carry on their activities as though it were day.

There is the darkness of the bedroom of the little child at night. The darkness terrifies him, and the little child has the sense that there is something foreboding about the darkness. But a little light drives away the fear, and the child sleeps soundly in the delicate glow of his nightlight.

There is the darkness of the deep and desolate caverns of the earth. That darkness is but a sign of the darkness at the cross.

There is the cold, silent darkness of the grave. That is but an entrance into the darkness at the cross.

But that darkness...

A form of that darkness came on the world once, when the day of Jehovah fell on Egypt. Then for three days and three nights, the darkness of the Lord terrified the Egyptians. God was in that darkness in his wrath and hot displeasure. Hell had come on Egypt. Hell is outer darkness, in which there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth and where the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die, an eternal wasteland swept desolate with the winds of the wrath of God.

So hell came to Golgotha that Friday afternoon, and hell swallowed up the cross of Christ and the whole universe with it.

And from the darkness came the cry of the agonizing Christ, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

A terrifying darkness!

The Son of God was terrified of it.

What shall we say of these verses?

Often the words of Christ are used as but a dramatic interjection in a sermon by those who have not thought long on their meaning. But these words are so deep, as deep as the darkness about which they speak. They contain so much that they hardly can be used as a mere interjection. They must be meditated upon by those who were saved in that darkness of Calvary.

The mystery of the cross of the Son of God is contained in these verses. The depth of his agony, the reality of the cross, the power of God’s anger, the perfection of his justice, the spotlessness of his holiness, the wickedness of man’s sins, and the wonder of God’s grace—all are contained in these short sentences. So Matthew records that from the sixth to the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.

That darkness ultimately expressed the meaning of Christ’s whole life. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary for the purpose of entering that darkness. The world entered into darkness in Adam. Yet as it is true of creation, so it is true of our salvation: the darkness is deepest before the coming of the dawn. At the cross the night was far spent and the day was at hand and the darkness of the world entered its deepest point. To enter into that darkness, he who is the light of life and of the world came in the likeness of our sinful flesh. From the moment of his incarnation, he lived in the shadow of that darkness. All his life he walked with steady and unflinching purpose to endure that darkness. He would enter into that darkness to bring a new day, a new age, a new creation, upon the world.

But especially at the end of his life, the darkness overshadowed him. All the events at the end of his life led up to those few hours. He ate the last supper with that

darkness looming before him. From the garden onward he entered into the agony of the cross and that darkness. In the garden the weight of that darkness pressed out of him a bloody sweat as the Son of God staggered under its weight. And as he looked into the cup that he had to drink, he saw that darkness swirling, and he was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, and descended into the darkness!

From the sixth to the ninth hour, a terrible darkness passed over the earth, and the Son of God hung in his suffering from the wooden beam.

Abruptly and without warning, the darkness came. As abruptly as the text begins, so abruptly the darkness of Golgotha came.

The hours of the cross were sharply divided by the darkness. There were two parts to the suffering of the cross: before the darkness and after the darkness.

Even from the perspective of Christ himself, there were two halves to his suffering on the cross. In the first part he was busy. He was concerned with those around him. He prayed that his Father would forgive those of his own who crucified him. He lovingly committed his mother to his disciple and charged his disciple to care for his mother. He comforted one of his own who was facing the fact of death with the promise that he would be with Christ in paradise.

From the perspective of his tormentors before the darkness, the cross seemed to be very much the work of man and the triumph of man. The cross seemed to be the tragic end of the ministry of Jesus Christ. It appeared as though it was the hour of the powers of darkness when they had their victory over the Christ. The chief priests and elders had worked their evil work. And with the help of the people, they had compelled Pilate to crucify Christ and to release to them the murderer Barabbas. The soldiers as well had had their fun with Jesus with their worn, purple robe of mockery; their flimsy, reed scepter of ridicule; and their painful, thorny crown that bloodied Jesus' skull. The soldiers had beaten, whipped, and ridiculed him as expressions of their contempt of that delusional Jew. And to the place of the skull, they had led him to be crucified in the midst of thieves and malefactors. The soldiers took Christ's clothes and divided them among themselves. They cast lots for his coveted vesture and stared at him as they gambled.

And as he hung, those who passed by reviled the dying Christ. There the human race was at its most disinterested and evil, merely passing by the most important scene in history to hurry on to finish the carnal business of the day. The cross was none of their business. But even in their disinterest, they could not help but stop and revile the dying Christ, blaspheme him, or hurl some gratuitous abuse to add to his suffering.

And likewise did the chief priests, mocking with the

scribes and the elders and the leaders of the people. The church of Jesus' day hated him and had no use for him. The leaders of the church rejected the crucified Christ. He did not serve their carnal interests and opposed their carnal theology, and besides, they envied him. Even the thieves who were crucified with Jesus and were about to die in the clutches of a horrible condemnation—but justly for their crimes—cast the same wicked blasphemies in his teeth.

Very evident at the cross was the wickedness of men, of the human race, and of the nations. Pontius Pilate, Herod, the Gentiles, the Jews, and the leaders of the people all were represented there, and they all were gathered against the Lord and against his holy child, Jesus. And what became clear at the cross was that he had no place among men. He was despised and rejected of men. There was no place for him in the church, and there was no place for him in the world. And it seemed to all—both church and world—that there was no place for him in heaven, for he hung on a cross. Thus they challenged him that if he was the Son of God, he should come down from the cross.

And with that first half of the cross—from the third hour to the sixth hour—the cross seemed to be very much the work of men and the powers of darkness.

Then the darkness came.

From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

That was no natural darkness!

It was no solar eclipse. The darkness was no gradual dimming of the sun, by which an eclipse is universally recognized. For the darkness came suddenly. At the sixth hour there was darkness. And at the ninth hour, as suddenly as the darkness came, it lifted. That darkness of the cross was no eclipse of the sun, for even then there is some light.

That was darkness.

All darkness.

That darkness was no localized darkness either. It was not dark merely at the place of the skull. It was not dark merely in Judea. It was not dark merely in Palestine or over the Roman world.

For Matthew tells us that it was dark over all the land, and the Greek word for land in the text means *earth*. At the sixth hour and until the ninth hour, the sphere of the earth was plunged into outer darkness. The whole world was enveloped in darkness.

Universal darkness.

It was a thick, formidable, palpable darkness, darkness with a terrifying heaviness to it, darkness of calamity and of impending doom. It was a darkness with which the darkness of the grave cannot be compared. It was the darkness of hell, yet deeper and darker than hell.

A terrifying sign!

A sign of what?

Of that darkness all the law, the prophets, and the psalms had spoken.

That darkness had appeared once before in Egypt on the day of Jehovah's visitation in judgment upon that land of the devil. For three days Jehovah had been present in his terrifying darkness. No one so much as moved.

The psalmist speaks that when Jehovah appears for judgment, then "clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne" (Ps. 97:2).

Amos said to apostate Israel, "Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light. Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:18, 20).

Joel warned Judah, "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness" (Joel 2:1-2).

When the darkness comes, God himself has entered the scene as judge. He whose hand was operating through all those wicked men and in the blaspheming crowds and who was hidden behind the instrumentation of men came personally in the darkness at the cross.

When God comes in darkness, with his coming the day of Jehovah has come, a day of judgment. Isaiah saw that day and spoke of it:

9. Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.
10. For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.
11. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.
12. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.
13. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. (Isa. 13:9-13)

The judge came to visit the iniquities of Israel. Jehovah came to judge the world in righteousness. He would destroy sinners out of the earth. On the fifteenth of Nisan, from the sixth to the ninth hour, in the year of

our Lord thirty-three, at the hill of the skull, at the cross in the center of three, the day of Jehovah happened, and Jehovah visited the iniquities of his people.

That darkness was the word of God. It was not a mere sign of what would happen, of what will happen, but it was a sign of what was happening then and there. It was the very presence of God himself! God was in the darkness. God came to judge his people in righteousness.

In his agonizing cry out of the outer darkness, the Son of God himself gave expression to the meaning of that darkness and to what was happening in that darkness. He shouted out to God with a loud voice for all to hear, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"

To be forsaken of God?

What does that mean?

What was the terror and agony in that statement of the forsaken Christ?

How did God in heaven forsake God in the flesh at the cross?

Who made that cry?

God in the flesh made that cry. He is personally the Word, the Son, Light of Light, and God of God. In his divine person he is united with the flesh of the virgin Mary. In his person there is the most intimate union between God and man that cannot be broken. He is both very God and very man. As a man, he is the obedient servant of Jehovah. He is the one faithful man. He is the delight of God. Eternally he is in God's bosom as the Son. As the Son of man, he is the one whom God loved and in whom God determined to glorify himself. He is the one in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. On earth he was God's singular joy and pleasure, so that God spoke from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him!"

Listen then as he cries out from the darkness!

Why so publicly does he issue his agonizing cry?

Does he not know the answer?

Is he not the willing mediator?

Had he not come to the cross knowing that he would meet his judge?

Christ asked the question not because he did not know, but that we might consider the darkness of Golgotha.

That Christ was forsaken of God is the meaning of the darkness. The Lord himself, hanging on the cross, gave public expression to the darkness when no eye could see. He revealed to us in that cry the terror of the darkness.

He was abandoned, left utterly destitute, and brought down into complete desolation. He was rejected of men. That would be tolerable if Jehovah would take him, if he could say like the psalmist that though father and mother forsake, Jehovah will take me up. But Christ found no acceptance from heaven. The reality of the darkness of the cross Christ gave expression to in the psalms:

4. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength:
 5. Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand.
 6. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.
 7. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves.
15. I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted.
 16. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. (Ps. 88:4–7, 15–16)

Sabachthani!

Thou hast forsaken me!

Oh, do not think that to be forsaken of God means that God leaves you in the strict sense of the word. Do not suppose that he is not near and does not surround the forsaken one with the whole of his divine being. That is an utter impossibility. The fool may will it so. The sinner wants it so. But God is present. He is present to all. God is God. He is present in all the instant and constant fullness of his divine being at every point of the universe and to every creature of the universe. He is present also to every person. Even the damned of hell cannot have their longed-for separation from God. He upholds everyone in their existence even there. Hell would have no terror, it would not be the place of eternal fire, and it would not be filled with the sounds of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth were it not for the presence of the eternal God.

The issue is not whether God is present. But the question for the forsaken one is, how is God present? He is present either in his grace, favor, and covenant fellowship, or he is present in the darkness of his fierce anger, avenging wrath, and destroying holiness.

When Jesus cried out that he was forsaken, we must not suppose that the meaning is that God was not present at the cross. It is impossible to escape him. God was present at Golgotha. The darkness was his. It was his presence that gave the darkness its terror because by means of that darkness God spoke. The darkness was the expression of a verdict, and the verdict was that Jesus was guilty. The darkness was the expression of the sentence, and the sentence was that Jesus must go to hell. God was present in his holiness and righteousness, which avenged his majesty that was offended by our sin.

Christ on the cross descended into hell.

On the cross he experienced the wrath of hell, the utter abandonment and yet terrible presence of the righteous God.

Yet more than that...

There was no descent into the darkness of hell like his! Not one was forsaken as he was. The wicked are forsaken. They experience the terrible presence of God. But they deserve it, and they receive it as the eternal objects of his hatred for their own personal sins. God never loved them.

Yet with Jesus, God was never displeased personally. Jesus had no personal sin. God was well pleased with his Son. He was the eternal object of God's good pleasure. And then in the three terrible hours of darkness, Christ was forsaken. In that he experienced not only one hell, but also the innumerable hells and eternities in hell that all the sins of all his people deserved. He did not experience being forsaken by his enemy but by his Father and friend. There God spared not his own Son but made him responsible for the sins of his people and punished him for their wickedness.

Silent was Christ through all the darkness. That darkness penetrated to his very heart and soul. In that darkness God was speaking loudly to Jesus Christ: "For the sins, for the guilt, for the iniquity of all your people..." The darkness was the very means along with the cross to work in him the word of God's curse.

Only at the end does Christ speak: "Why has thou forsaken me?"

My God! My God!

Yes, his God and the God of his people had forsaken him.

The gospel of these two words is clear. At the moment of his deepest desolation, out of the blackness he gives expression to the reason that he had to be forsaken in the darkness.

That darkness God willed eternally in love for his people. To suffer that darkness, Christ came as the mediator of God's covenant in perfect love for God and for his brethren whom God had given to him.

Christ came because God had made an eternal promise to his elect people never to leave them nor forsake them. Christ came because God would not impute their sins to them and hold them responsible for their sins, but he imputed their sins to his Son and made him responsible for those sins. He came because the love of God determined that he would be their God and they should be his people. This people were guilty of forsaking him. They forsook him in Adam, and they forsake him all their lives by all their sins. They are guilty! Christ is responsible!

In that forsaking presence of God, Christ made the perfect sacrifice of obedience. He loved God in the darkness as God forsook him and poured out his wrath upon him. God was his God all through the darkness. Christ was forsaken so that he and his people might be received everlastingly because of God's everlasting mercy, the steadfast covenant love of God, in faithfulness to his promise that the sons of Jacob are not consumed.

What explains that darkness and that agonizing cry from the utter darkness is the mercy of God!

His everlasting, electing love for his Jacob.

Because of which he spared not his own Son but delivered him over to the darkness.

Until the ninth hour!

There was an end!

There was an end to the infinite wrath of God at the cross. The infinite was compressed into a few short hours, a wonder like Christ's incarnation when all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in him.

The power of that little word *until!* Darkness *until!*

From the sixth to the ninth hour.

The servant of Jehovah had his answer from heaven in the return of the light. In him the wrath of God came to an end. The mystery of the cross: the infinite wrath of God came to an end. God was satisfied. Sin was covered. His church was justified and reconciled. Salvation was accomplished. Heaven was opened, and a new and living way to God was consecrated.

And ultimately the answer to Christ's question came with the rising of the morning sun and the resurrection of the Lord of glory for our justification. Out of the darkness he brought to light life and immortality.

And you were either forsaken with him, or you will be forsaken without him.

All who are in him by faith shall never be forsaken. In that darkness the salvation of God's people was accomplished, and the promise of the covenant was realized

and established. From heaven Christ causes the light of the knowledge of God to shine in our hearts through the gospel of his cross and resurrection. He calls us out of darkness into his marvelous light. In his light we see light!

And he comforts us! Because God forsook his Son for us and in our place, he will never leave us nor forsake us even in the darkest moments as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. All who believe on him may be assured, absolutely assured, that he is with them in their greatest trials and temptations and that in those God works their eternal salvation. Thanks be to God that he is with us and that he is for us.

And when the sun is darkened one more time and thick darkness comes again over all the land, when the day of Jehovah descends on the earth with the coming of the Son of man, when the judge once more takes his place on his great white throne in the person of Jesus Christ, then you were either judged with him at Golgotha, or you will be judged without him there before his throne.

All those and only those who are in him by faith will be safe in that day of Jehovah. All who are outside him will be doomed to that darkness, where there will be weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth and the terrifying presence of the holy God—eternally. All who are in him will enter into the city of light, whose doors never shut and where darkness never comes and where there is no need for the sun and moon, for the Son of God himself is the light of it.

—NJL

EDITORIAL

UNION WITH CHRIST (6): THE CALLING CONTINUED

The Sinner's Salvation

We have been considering the riches of salvation that are in Christ Jesus and that become ours in union with him. Christ is the one in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid. We become one with him by faith, which is the graft that joins elect sinners with Christ. All the benefits of salvation are given to them in that union. Among those benefits of salvation is the calling.

Examining the calling in connection with union with Christ refutes every corruption of the calling, especially

the corruption of the calling by the false doctrine of the well-meant gospel offer. The well-meant gospel offer teaches that God—in love for humanity in general and with a desire to save humanity in general—offers salvation in the preaching of the gospel to all who hear. In that offer God gives grace to those who hear, so that they are able to respond positively to and accept the offer by faith. This view of the calling is entirely divorced from election. It is a doctrine that stands in complete opposition to predestination, which teaches that God does not love all men but loves his elect alone and that he hates

the reprobate. The well-meant offer's view of the calling is also divorced from the truth of union with Christ. The calling comes to the elect as they are in union with Christ by a true faith. The calling does not create that union but is a fruit of the union and is demanded by the union. The calling is thus for those and those only who are in Christ. They have Christ already, although they are not yet conscious of it. The calling brings to their consciousness the fact and reality of their salvation in Christ, so that by it they come to conscious faith, repent, are justified, sanctified, and glorified—sitting already in Christ Jesus in heavenly places. They come to know their regeneration and are assured of their election.

From this viewpoint the calling is also a simple summary of their salvation in Christ. The calling is not a prelude, a condition, or a way unto salvation; the calling is not a step that man takes after he makes a decision, after which he then proceeds to other steps of salvation. But the calling is the elect's salvation, for in the calling they come to the knowledge that they belong to Christ, are elect of God, and possess the whole of their salvation in Christ.

That the calling is the instrument to bring to the elect the consciousness of the whole of their salvation, including the assurance of their election, is clear from scripture. So the apostle Paul writes,

28. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.
29. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. (Rom. 11:28–29)

The subject of these verses is God's love of the Jews. It is not a love for the Jews in general, as though God loved them all head for head. Rather, it is God's love for the nation of the Jews, or Jewish people, as they are represented in the elect remnant from which God took his people for several thousand years and from which nation he will still draw them. No Christian may be an anti-Semite. God loves the Jews. The ground of God's abiding love for Jews is that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." There the apostle speaks of the calling. The simple reference, of course, could be to regeneration as the first calling to life of the dead sinner because scripture does speak of regeneration in terms of the calling. So God calls the dead sinner to life, and in that calling God bestows on him in principle the whole of his salvation.

However, it is better to say that the apostle speaks of the calling of the sinner at the level of his consciousness. This calling brings with it all the gifts of God to the sinner's consciousness. Those gifts are the knowledge of his whole salvation: election, atonement, reconciliation, regeneration, repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, and glorification. These are without repentance on

God's part. If God gives them to you once, he will always give them to you. The sinner pleads this grace before God when he sins. This grace is the sinner's confidence to come to God again and again. God will never refuse to receive the elect sinner, for the calling and gifts of God are without repentance. The sinner knows this, for he knows that God has received him in the past, has addressed him in the depth of his being, and has assured him of his salvation. And the sinner knows that God will always do so.

The point here is that calling and the gifts come together, and calling is the means by which God gives these things to the elect sinner in his consciousness and experience. It is not the coming of the sinner to Christ that gives the experience of these things. But it is the calling of God that gives these things to the sinner, so that as fruit and effect he comes to God. If the elect sinner does not know that God has elected him, reconciled him to God, and justified him, then he will never come to God.

Calling—that God speaks to his people in his grace and translates them from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear Son—is blessedness itself and brings all blessedness with it, so that the rest of the sinner's conscious knowledge and experience of his salvation is the fruit and work of the calling. By the power of the calling, the elect sinner believes, repents, is justified, sanctified, and in principle glorified.

How do we define the calling?

The calling is that wonderwork of the grace of God, whereby through the preaching of the gospel the triune God in Christ and through the Spirit of Christ addresses the elect, regenerated sinner in the depth of his being and before his consciousness and summons him from darkness to light and from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son, so that the elect sinner infallibly comes to Christ.

The essential elements of this definition are the following: The calling is the work of the triune God in Christ and through the Spirit of Christ. The calling is a wonder of grace. The calling is by means of the preaching of the gospel. The calling is of the elect. The calling is a divine summons that issues infallibly in the sinner's coming to Christ—from darkness to light and from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ. The calling takes place at the level of the sinner's consciousness. I will explain briefly each element of the calling.

The Work of the Triune God

The calling of the elect sinner is the work of the triune God. I emphasized in the previous article that the calling is the work of God. Calling is not of men, learned or not, speaking about God, but calling is God himself speaking. Really at this point every issue in the controversy over the calling is settled. Because the calling is the speaking of the triune

God, the calling is living, sovereign, powerful, efficacious, and irresistible. The calling cannot possibly be an offer. The calling never can wait on the response of man and cannot involve the cooperation of man with God, for then God is not God. In my mind this is the most important point to make about the calling: in the calling God speaks.

That the calling is the speaking of God is not only important regarding the internal address of the elect sinner, but it is also important for a proper view of the instrument by which the calling comes to the sinner: preachers and the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel is God speaking; preaching is the Word of God; in the preaching Christ himself assumes his place as teacher in the church; through the preaching the Spirit of Christ carries on his work in the church. To despise the preaching is to despise God who speaks therein. To reject the preaching is to reject God who calls thereby. To hate the preaching is to hate Christ who teaches in it. To turn your back on the preaching is to despise the Spirit who works by means of it. The Reformed faith and the Reformed church have the highest regard for the preaching. The Reformed minister may not allow the preaching to be despised, and neither may the Reformed consistory. To do so is to allow God to be ignored, spited, and rejected. So Christ also says that when a town rejected the Word of God that came by the apostles, then they were to shake the dust from them and that it would be worse for that city than for Sodom and Gomorrah:

14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.
15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. (Matt. 10:14–15)

Here I emphasize that the calling is the work of the triune God. Each person of the Trinity is involved in the calling. The triune God through Christ Jesus, his Son, and by the power of the Spirit of Christ addresses his elect people in the depths of their beings. Calling, as all the works of salvation, is the work of the triune God.

God in Jesus Christ speaks in the calling. Scripture makes clear that Christ personally speaks in the calling. The writer to the Hebrews says,

25. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:
26. Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

27. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.
28. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:
29. For our God is a consuming fire. (Heb. 12:25–29)

Here is a comparison between the speaking of Christ on the earth at the time of Moses, when Christ's voice shook the ground at Mount Sinai, and his speaking from heaven now. One did not escape if he refused the one who spoke on the earth. Now that same one, Jesus Christ, speaks from heaven, and with that same voice he will once more shake the very foundations of the universe to reveal God's eternal kingdom. The point is that Christ speaks from heaven now.

That Christ speaks in the calling is also the teaching of Paul: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). According to the correct translation of the verse, it should read, "How shall they believe in him *whom* they have not heard?" There is a difference between your hearing about someone and your hearing that person speak. The point in the passage is that we hear Christ himself. Faith comes by hearing. The one whom you must hear is Jesus Christ. You must not hear men merely speak about him, but you must hear him. And such is the power of his voice that he works faith; and believing, you call on him; and calling on him, you are saved!

The apostle teaches similarly in his epistle to the Thessalonians: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). The apostle refers to his and the apostles' preaching. The Thessalonians heard that word, and what they heard was the word of men, inasmuch as the word came through men; yet in truth it was the very word of God that the Thessalonians heard. And we must understand the phrase "word of God" as a reference to Jesus Christ. They heard Jesus Christ. It is only because that word of the apostles was the very Word of God that it worked effectually to cause the Thessalonians to believe. Just as the call of God in Genesis 1 was the Word, which according to John 1 became flesh in time, so also in salvation the calling of God is the living, powerful speaking of Jesus Christ, the Word

that became flesh. Jesus Christ is not only the content of the calling, so that the preacher preaches Jesus Christ and him crucified, but Jesus Christ is also the subject of the calling, so that he is the one doing the calling.

The calling is the living voice of God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ. Calling is a work of the triune God. All of God's works outside himself in creation, redemption, and sanctification are the works of the triune God, so that each person is involved. So also the calling is a work of the triune God. The calling must also involve the Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ who works on Christ's behalf. The Spirit applies the calling to the heart of the elect, regenerated sinner. Isaiah says, "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). The work of the Spirit never can be separated from the Word, and the Word never can be separated from the Spirit. The Spirit does not speak to men apart from the Word, and the Word always comes in the power of the Spirit to effectually work in the elect hearing, faith, and salvation.

Irresistible

Because the calling is the speaking of God, it is powerful, efficacious, and irresistible. If the calling were the mere speaking of men about God, it would have no power. Because the calling is powerful, efficacious, and irresistible, the called, elect sinner is translated out of darkness and into God's light and from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. This movement of the sinner is not a mere possibility that is dependent on the will of the sinner or that waits until the sinner accepts an offer from God. Such a thought is totally at odds with the truth that the calling is the voice of God. God does not wait upon man. God does not allow man to make the first move and then act in response to man. God speaks, and it is. God speaks, and man comes. God speaks, and man cannot resist him.

This truth is the main thought of Christ's teaching about the calling: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

The first offensive thing for the Jews in this teaching of Christ was that they supposed that men come to God by the power of their own obedience. The Jews taught that men choose to come to God. God is waiting, as it were, for men to come to him. God makes the offer, and men must accept it. But Christ puts the choice of who comes and the power of their coming in God alone. The second offensive point for the Jews of Christ's teaching was that Christ made himself the one to whom all must come. Men

must cast off all their choices, labors, and activities and rest in Christ alone; they must count all things as loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus.

Thus Christ destroys all pretensions of the ungodly and unbelieving. It is he alone to whom men must come. When Christ speaks of the Father's drawing men to Christ, the word *drawing* means the irresistible moving of someone by a superior force. In Acts 21:30 the mob drew Paul out of the temple. There was no resisting on his part. So the Father draws men to Christ, and they cannot resist him.

That the calling is irresistible is also the point in comparing the calling to the creation of the world. The mighty God in creation "callesh those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17). In God's calling of the elect, he calls with the same irresistibility: "For 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" (2 Cor. 4:6).

It is as absurd to say that the sinner resists God as to say that light resisted its creation. God's voice is powerful and creative, giving existence to what was not before, and against it there is no resistance. Since God wills the salvation of the elect sinner, the calling accomplishes that saving will of God.

Such is the graciousness of God's effectual and irresistible call that those who are called come freely and willingly. The calling does not drag the sinner against his will, but the calling makes the sinner willing to come. This is nothing more than to say that the fruit of the calling is the sinner's real knowledge of God and his real coming to God in his heart, mind, and will. Or in the language of the Canons of Dort 3–4.12 with regard to conversion:

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

Applying this thought to the calling, we would say as a *consequence*—that is the key word—man is rightly said to come to God or to know God. Consequence! The calling of the sinner does not wait on the sinner to come, but the calling produces the coming in the sinner.

Conscious

In distinction from the engrafting of the elect sinner into Christ and the regeneration of the elect, the calling takes place at the level of the sinner's consciousness. This is nothing more than saying that the calling issues in the elect, regenerated sinner's having the saving knowledge of God as the God of his salvation. Before the calling the sinner was ignorant of God. The sinner through the

calling knows God and knows God as the God who saved him with a holy calling. God called the sinner out of darkness into God's marvelous light.

Concerning this truth the apostle says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Darkness is the state of spiritual ignorance and enmity against God that characterizes the natural man. In darkness the sinner is dead. By regeneration God makes the sinner who was dead to be alive. Now we come to the conscious side. That dead sinner was in darkness. His darkness was not a matter of ignorance only but also of conscious rebellion and hatred against God and deliberate contradiction of God. Knowing that God is and that God must be served and having the work of the law written in his heart, so that he was able to discern right from wrong, the dead sinner held God's truth in unrighteousness. One could say the same thing in the sphere of the church with all the appropriate changes: the unregenerate in the sphere of the church beholds all the glory of God and consciously rejects that in hatred for God. That one in darkness God translates into light. That light is the glorious knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In that light then there is the conscious knowledge of God—an illumination of the mind, so that the translated one knows God and loves him. Then the fruit is that he seeks God as the highest good.

By Means

Fitting to the reality that calling takes place at the level of the elect sinner's consciousness is that calling takes place by means. As insistent as we are that regeneration takes place without means, so insistent are we that in the calling God uses means. We deny that God uses the preaching of the gospel as a means in regeneration. The preaching of the gospel is not the instrument of regeneration. As little as God will use preachers of the gospel to raise the dead at the end of the ages, so little does God use preachers of the gospel to regenerate his elect people. Yet regeneration takes place in the closest connection with the calling, and regeneration itself demands that the raised-from-the-dead sinner be called into God's light in the sinner's own mind and conscience. This calling takes place by means. The means is the preaching of the gospel. However, the means is not simply preaching. Many sermons have been preached that do not call anyone. The means is not emotionally moving preaching or intellectually stimulating preaching, which preaching for all its effects on men's emotions and minds is without the gospel. The means is the preaching of the *gospel*. The preaching of the gospel is the instrument by which the Holy Spirit addresses the elect sinner in his heart and

mind and calls him out of darkness into God's marvelous light.

Peter says about calling and the preaching,

23. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.
24. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:
25. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (1 Pet. 1:23–25)

The thought of Peter is that the living and abiding Word, Jesus Christ, is that which begat us without the preaching. The Word of God that lives and abides forever is not the preaching but Christ personally. Having begotten us, it is this same living and abiding Word, Jesus Christ, that is also preached to us by the gospel. The gospel is the instrument after our regeneration to bring us the living and abiding Word. The apostle Paul says the same thing to the Thessalonians: "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14). The gospel is the means by which Christ calls us. All corruption of the content of the preaching is an attack on the calling, and by that corruption God does not call.

Internal and External

Because the calling comes by means, we must insist that the calling has two aspects. I emphasize that there are not two callings. There is one calling. That one calling has two aspects to it.

The external aspect is the preaching of the word through the ordained teaching elder or minister of the word. So Paul says,

14. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?
15. And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:14–15)

What are the vital elements of the external aspect of the calling?

The preacher must preach Christ. He sets forth the fullness of Christ's person, nature, and work. The minister sets forth Jesus Christ as God's salvation for his guilty and damnable people and the one in whom God has fulfilled all his promises and through whom

God has reconciled his people to himself. In other words, the preacher sets forth Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, apart from whom no man comes to the Father.

I note that this setting forth of Christ is not simply a setting forth of Christ for sinners, but it is a setting forth of Christ for God's elect people. The preaching of Christ is election preaching. The apostle Paul shows the way:

18. And 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. (2 Cor. 5:18–21)

There is not only the setting forth of Christ as reconciliation in a general sense but the reconciliation of "us." And that "us" is God's elect people. It is that very preaching of Christ as the Christ of election that draws the elect to him.

Having set forth Christ, the preacher also summons the whole audience to repent, to believe, and to come to Christ, and the preacher includes the promise that everyone who obeys the summons will be received in mercy. This is not the preaching that points out conditions for coming to Christ or what man must do to experience Christ's salvation, but it is preaching that points out the characteristics that the preaching works in God's elect people, whereby through that preaching they are manifest as his people. All hear. But not all are made sorry, and not all believe. This is not a failure of those who hear to fulfill a condition, but it is a revelation that they have no part in Christ and are not God's people. The preacher then also warns that everyone who refuses to repent and believe falls under the judgment of God and will perish everlastingly. Importantly, in the preaching there is also instruction to those who do believe to obey all God's commands in his word. Christ made this part of the great commission in Matthew 28:19–20:

19. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
20. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Those who are made disciples of Christ are immediately called to obey all that Christ commanded as the fruit of faith and conversion.

The internal aspect of the calling is the secret operation of the Spirit in the heart of the elect, regenerated sinner that makes the preached word that falls on the ear effectual in that man's knowledge of God as his God and in that man's coming to Jesus Christ in faith. Or, if you will, the secret address of the elect sinner in his heart is by means of the preached word, by which God works faith in the sinner's heart regarding all that is preached to him. The internal aspect of the calling is distinguished from the external aspect of the calling but is not separated from the external. The internal aspect takes place by the means of the external aspect. There is one call. One of the many fallacies of the well-meant gospel offer is that it posits two calls—one call to all men and another call to the elect. There is one saving calling of God that has two inseparable aspects. The internal has the external as its means. The external has the internal as its secret power. The calling is of the elect and them only, though the preaching comes to all who hear.

The internal aspect is the drawing of the Father that Christ spoke about:

44. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.
45. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. (John 6:44–45)

The internal call is what Paul means when he refers to his preaching: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13). And the internal call is what Paul describes 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."

This distinction between the internal and external aspects of the calling implies that the saving calling may not be identified simply with the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel is not necessarily gracious all by itself. It is gracious according to the election and internal calling of God. This is a confessional distinction, according to Canons of Dordt 3–4.11:

When God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect, or works in them true conversion, He not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them, and powerfully illuminates their minds by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand

and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised; infuses new qualities into the will, which, though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree it may bring forth the fruits of good actions. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168)

God not only causes the gospel to be externally preached, but he also pervades the inmost recesses of the heart. There you have in different words what we mean by the distinction between the internal and external aspects of the calling.

Purpose

The purpose of the calling is twofold. This is the teaching of Canons of Dordt 1.6:

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 it to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 156)

God has one purpose, the purpose of predestination, for the gathering of the elect and the hardening of the reprobate. That purpose he reveals through the calling.

The primary purpose of the calling is the gathering of the elect into Christ as those who were chosen as the body of Jesus Christ.

9. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:
10. For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. (Acts 18:9–10)

The Lord appeared to Paul at the beginning of his mission work in Corinth. God's word to Paul was that he had to stay in Corinth because God had many elect people in the city. God had a church by election there, and Paul had to preach for the gathering of that church. In 2 Timothy 2:10 Paul says, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Paul looks back on his entire ministry and says that the reason that he preached the gospel was for the elect's sakes, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. The point of the word "obtain" is not that the elect did not have salvation in election or at the cross, for they were reconciled to God before Paul ever preached. Rather, the point is that through the calling this salvation in its entirety is brought into their conscious possession, and they are brought to glory.

The calling brings the elect to Christ and brings their salvation to them. "[God] who 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" (2 Tim. 1:9). According to this verse the origin of the call is the grace of God in his eternal, gracious purpose in election. Out of that gracious determination, the call itself is a gracious, saving power that delivers from the greatest evil of darkness, sin, and death. The calling is salvation.

The calling gives eternal life. "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12).

The calling gives liberty. "Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

The calling brings peace with God. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col. 3:15).

The calling brings rest from the toil of sin and guilt and places on our necks the easy yoke of Christ.

28. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
29. 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.
30. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt 11:28–30)

The calling brings us into the kingdom now and in glory. "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12).

The other aspect of God's purpose with the calling is to harden the reprobate who hear the preaching in their sin and to render them more without excuse.

In the external call God is serious and unfeigned. God presents Jesus Christ to the reprobate as the only way of salvation and confronts them with their solemn duty to repent and believe. The imperative of the gospel does not reveal God's purpose regarding the eternal destiny of those individuals. The coming of the gospel and its imperative is not the expression of a sincere desire to save all those to whom the gospel comes. The fallacy of the well-meant gospel offer is that God can only be serious if he sincerely desires the salvation of all those to whom the imperative of the gospel comes. Rather, God is serious in expressing what man's duty is before the gospel. So much is this true that man aggravates his condemnation when he insults the Son of God and despises the way of salvation that is set before him. This is plain concerning the external call by a study of God's command to Pharaoh that he let the people go. God was serious in his command, but it was not the will of his decree that Pharaoh let the people go and be saved but that he would aggravate his wickedness and be destroyed.

This purpose of God with the unbelief of the reprobate is the teaching of Peter:

7. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,
8. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. (1 Pet. 2:7–8)

Many stumble at the word because they were appointed to stumble at the word. This is the purpose of God with the preaching to the reprobate. It is a clear lie to teach that God has a gracious purpose to all who hear the gospel. He has no gracious purpose toward the reprobate.

The effect of the preaching of the gospel to the reprobate is always the same: they are hardened in their sins. Recognizing that ultimately the reprobate all fall away from the truth, there is room for a distinction in the effect that we see. The parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3–8, 18–23 makes this clear. The sowing of the seed on all the other kinds of soil beside the good soil is always that there is no fruit, but there are some differences in the course to this end. The hard path shows those on whose consciousness the preaching has no effect, but the devil snatches the preaching away. They quickly say that they want nothing to do with the preaching. On the stony ground the seed shoots up in the thin soil but is quickly burned. The same is true for the thorny ground, but the shoot is choked. These both represent nothing more than a temporary, religious emotion and a false, temporary faith, which is no faith at all. In the end all are hardened, and they reject the truth according to the reprobation of God.

The classic text on this is Hebrews 6:4–8:

4. It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,
5. And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,
6. If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.
7. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God:
8. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

These verses are not teaching losable salvation, but they are a vivid description of apostasy from the truth by those who appeared to hold to it but who, according to the reprobation of God, reject the truth in the end.

Canons of Dort 3–4.9 speaks of the same reality:

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted. The fault lies in themselves; some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the Word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart; therefore their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the Word by perplexing cares and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13). (*Confessions and Church Order*, 168)

Such is the power of the preaching of the gospel that some have an intellectual and emotional apprehension of the glories and message of the gospel. Yet they fall away, ultimately being hardened by that preaching and turning from it in hatred.

It is in this conviction of the calling as strictly controlled by the sovereignty of God that the true church in the world preaches the gospel wherever and to whomever God in his good pleasure sends it, knowing that the effect of the preaching is wholly in the power of God according to his sovereign good pleasure.

—NJL

It is no secret that the Reformed Protestant Churches and First Reformed Protestant Church in particular have endured another sifting at the hand of the Lord. The membership of First church is greatly diminished, and yet she will be stronger on account of it. There were many at First who from the beginning hid their true sentiments—sentiments that were contrary to the public preaching, writing, and decisions of the churches. It also is clear that their dishonesty and sentiments had a purpose. Their purpose was to change the entire direction of the Reformed Protestant Churches. The Lord now has exposed the leaders of that movement.

The days in which the church lives are perilous times. These times are characterized by the falling away of many from the truth. Many appear in the church who have a form of godliness but deny the power of it and who use their influence to sway others to their departures. We were warned that this would be the case for the church in the new dispensation. Now we have lived it in the brief history of Reformed Believers Publishing, *Sword and Shield*, and the Reformed Protestant Churches. We have been witnesses to many defections from the truth by those who have been seduced by the lawless spirit of the age and have been bewitched by the cunningly crafted arguments and false doctrines of the leaders of these defections. Many whom we thought stood with us in our righteous cause have shown that they love this present world, and they have gone out from us as the revelation that they were not of us. Many whose faith appeared so verdant have revealed that they are rooted in stony or thorny ground and have been choked by the cares of this world or burnt by the searing heat of persecution and personal loss.

We do not rejoice in the fall of those who have left us. Perhaps the Lord yet will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. That would be our desire, but God's will be done. We are sober in the face of apostasy and acknowledge the perfect sovereignty of God, who has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he wills he hardens. We stand in awe with the apostle Paul when we see that those who preach the gospel are a savor of life unto life and a savor of death unto death. We utter his words in holy reverence at the righteous judgments of God through the preaching: Who is sufficient for these things? The preaching—which is foolishness to the world and to the unspiritual man—is the power of God to justify and save his people, and it is the power of God to harden men in their own conceits, unbelief, and other sins.

The preaching that we heard from the pulpits of the Reformed Protestant Churches and the writing that we read on the pages of *Sword and Shield* have come with great clarity and sharpness. The preaching and writing have given to all who heard and read a taste of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come. And it is in that very clarity of the word that the unbelief of many over against that word is even more staggering. They were enlightened and partook of a heavenly gift. It is as though they had been lifted up in the Spirit to see the very towers, walls, glory, and riches of the heavenly city, and they have turned away from it.

Shocking unbelief!

But divisions must come on the church, according to the absolutely righteous and good counsel of God. The church herself is a warring church. She has the victory through her Lord Jesus Christ. As she wars she is already the church triumphant. The very gates of hell cannot prevail against her. *Sword and Shield* is committed to this warfare of the church. May the Lord keep us from turning back in the day of battle and from doing the work of the Lord in battle lackadaisically. May he use the writing in *Sword and Shield* also to arm his people for the fight.

In this issue we have the usual meditation and editorial. The editorial is a continuation of the series on the application of salvation to the elect titled “Union with Christ.” *Sword and Shield* not only damns the lie but also does so in the context of a positive contribution to the development of the truth. The editorial series intends to be that. Reverend Bomers carries on with his explanations of the old dispensational sacrifices. Reverend Ophoff takes on two enemies of the truth in his rubric *Understanding the Times*. One of the defectors from the Reformed Protestant Churches and Reformed Believers Publishing was supposed to submit an article for this issue in the *Running Footmen* rubric. He has instead renounced his former convictions and is running away. The rubric has been filled ably by Caleb Ophoff on the subject of dragging the Pelagian error out of hell. False teachers who are intent on bringing man and his works into salvation have been doing that for millennia, and we are witness to this again today. Reverend Pascual continues his work on the knowledge of man and writes on man's expulsion from paradise.

We pray that the Lord will use the writing in this issue for your edification and growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

—NJL

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

SET FOR A DEFENSE

Introduction

In my rubric this month, I publish and respond to two letters. The first letter comes from Rev. Clayton Spronk, a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is good to see that people in the Protestant Reformed Churches still are keeping an eye on what is written in *Sword and Shield*, although they rarely admit that they read it for themselves. As a writer for *Sword and Shield*, I welcome letters from friend and foe who acknowledge and interact with what has been preached or written in order that the truth may be sharpened and further proclaimed. The second letter was sent out by Mr.

Tom Bodbyl to the members of First Reformed Protestant Church shortly after he left First church. Mr. Bodbyl's letter, which is full of deceit, gives the reasons that he could no longer be a member in the Reformed Protestant Churches. Only one month prior to the sending out of his letter, Mr. Bodbyl was filling the position of a watchman on the walls of Zion as an elder, so it is hypocritical and unloving for him to send his letter out now, after he has left. My intent is to unveil the cloak of deceit and hypocrisy that covers his letter so that the truth of the matter may come to light.

Letter from Rev. Clayton Spronk

To whom it may concern,

It has come to my attention that I have been charged by one of your contributors with surreptitiously teaching common grace. As I understand the argument my teaching is presented thus:

1. I believe in common grace (but don't want to tell anyone).
2. This means there is some good in everyone by common grace, including in churches and Christians outside the Protestant Reformed Churches (and the Reformed Protestant Churches)
3. Therefore, it is legitimate to have fellowship with churches and people outside the Protestant Reformed Churches.

I openly admit that I affirm the conclusion that it is legitimate (even the calling) of members of the PRCA to have fellowship with churches and people outside of the PRCA. But I deny premises 1 and 2. I don't believe in common grace. I don't believe that there is a little good in everyone because God is the Giver of common grace.

No the issue is far more serious than common grace. I affirm only one kind of grace - sovereign, saving grace. I believe an holy catholic church that is saved by God's grace in Jesus Christ (9th article of the Apostles' Creed)! The members of this church don't have some good in them at all by nature, but have the forgiveness of sins (10th article of the Apostles' Creed) as the gracious gift of God to them only for the sake of the merits of Jesus Christ. Who belongs to this holy catholic church, which is also the communion of saints? Many more people than belong to the PRCA (or the RPC). I promote and live in fellowship with saints from other churches, not because they have some good from a supposed common grace of God, but because they, like me, enjoy salvation by the saving grace of God!

Your contributor charged me with teaching all men have some good because of common grace. I deny the charge.

If you had charged me with teaching God saves many people in churches outside the PRCA by His grace in Jesus Christ, to that I would say guilty as charged!

Rev. Clayton Spronk
Pastor of Faith PRC

Member of Christ's Universal Church

REPLY TO REVEREND SPRONK

I appreciate Reverend Spronk's fair representation of what I wrote. I wrote as much to him in an email, but I also acknowledge that publicly to the readership of *Sword and Shield*. I believe the occasion for his letter was my mention that he had publicly shared an invitation to Rodney Kleyn's colloquium doctum upon re-entering the ministry in the United Reformed Churches.¹ I charged such approval on Reverend Spronk's part as necessarily being grounded on the theory of common grace. False ecumenism and friendship with the world have no basis in the truth but find common ground in common grace.

Over against the protestations of Reverend Spronk, I maintain my position that the ground of such ecumenical relationships must necessarily be founded on the idea of common grace.

To support his claim that such ecumenical relationships are legitimate, Reverend Spronk appeals to the Apostles' Creed, specifically the article regarding the catholic, or universal, church. It is an appeal to the lowest common denominator of Christianity. There are Roman Catholics and Christian Reformed men and women who can agree with that. But Reverend Spronk is not Roman Catholic; neither is he Christian Reformed. He is Protestant Reformed, for now. And as a pastor in the Protestant Reformed Churches, he vowed to teach, uphold, and defend the three forms of unity. These creeds teach the explicit meaning of the phrase "an holy, catholic church."

The universal church is the elect body of Christ as she has existed eternally in God's counsel for the purpose of God's glory. The universal body of Christ does not remain hidden in God's counsel but manifests herself in the church institute. The universal church may not be pitted against the church institute in support of false ecumenism. Ecumenism apart from the truth portrays the two to be at odds with each other, that the church universal and the church institute disagree. But they do not disagree nor contradict one another. They cannot. What stands at the heart of both the universal church and the church institute is election. The children of God in the world were appointed to belief of the truth and not a lie (Acts 13:48; John 10:27). The reprobate are not of Christ's sheep and therefore believe not the truth but believe a lie (John 10:26; 2 Thess. 2:11–12).

Lord's Day 21 is the article in the Heidelberg Catechism on the church.

Q. 54. What believest thou concerning "the holy catholic church" of Christ?

A. That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am, and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 104)

A key phrase in answer 54 is that the church "[agrees] in true faith." What does that mean to Reverend Spronk? How does he explain that? One might make an appeal and say that that refers to faith as believing in Christ. If Reverend Spronk takes it that way, then if someone says the mere words, "I believe in Jesus Christ," we agree in true faith. But that is not true. To agree in true faith means that the universal church and the instituted church on earth agree in doctrine and are one in the truth. There is no division or separation between the two.

That this is true means that I can state without any trouble at all that if Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David were living at this point in history, they would be members of the Reformed Protestant Churches. Some will cry out that it is prideful, but it is simply the application of the truth that the church universal and the church institute agree in true faith. If Reverend Spronk's denomination and church cannot say that, then he ought to examine why.

The holy, catholic church, or universal church, is not a multiformity of churches that believe different things about the Bible. Faith believes all that God has revealed. Faith does not believe a lie about marriage, divorce, and remarriage; about creation in six literal, twenty-four-hour days; about the infallibility and inerrancy of scripture; or about how God blesses and saves his people. What does Reverend Spronk say about someone who does not believe all the doctrines of scripture? Does he console himself that they are good people? that they outwardly live good lives? that they say the magic words, "I believe in Jesus"? If a person does not believe all that God reveals about himself in his word, what ground for fellowship does Spronk have other than common grace? How else can he justify ecumenical relationships apart from the truth?

The Heidelberg Catechism gives the judgment in Lord's Day 11:

Q. 30. Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

¹ Tyler D. Ophoff, "The Antithesis and Common Grace," *Sword and Shield* 5, no. 8 (January 2025): 20.

A. They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 95)

Therefore, the believer condemns those who do not believe in the God of the scriptures.

The explanation of all the different denominations and churches is not the pluriformity of the church, that every church has some truth even though they differ in doctrine and confession. The only explanation of the multitude of Reformed churches is God's sovereign will of election and reprobation that he is carrying out in the world and a massive apostasy from the truth, upon which the antichrist will ride into the world.

Ephesians 4:5–6 is conclusive: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” There is only one universal church, one head, one faith, one baptism, one doctrine, and one way of salvation. The universal church and the instituted church agree together in doctrine. They stood as one in eternity. They stand as one now. There is no difference between the truth now, two thousand years ago, or six thousand years ago. This is the stance of Belgic Confession article 27 as well:

This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof...Furthermore, this holy church...is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 58–60)

By their false ecumenism Reverend Spronk and many in the nominally Christian and Reformed world really deny God's sovereign grace. They deny God's powerful, sovereign, efficacious grace to actually realize by his Word and Spirit confessional oneness in his church throughout all time and history. They think that they need to help God out a little. Overlook some “minor” points of doctrine. Wink at a few lies. All in the service of friendship with those who have shown themselves to be enemies of the truth.

Reverend Spronk tries to ground his reason for fellowship with members within the universal church not on the fact that there is some good in them by nature but that they

have the forgiveness of sins and enjoy God's salvation. But Lord's Day 21 also gives the explanation about the forgiveness of sins. Whose sins are forgiven? Who has salvation? Who has God's grace and favor? The child of God who is chosen and gathered into the church has forgiveness. By his Word and Spirit Christ “gathers” his church of chosen people to everlasting life. The answer stands interconnected with Belgic Confession 28, which, speaking of the church institute, teaches that “out of it there is no salvation” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 60). Only in the true church is there the forgiveness of sins. God's elect children manifest themselves as members of the true church, having salvation and the forgiveness of sins. To stay outside the true church, to refuse to join her, and to stay in a false church, is the manifestation that one is an unbeliever, believes a lie, and has not the forgiveness of sins, having the kingdom of heaven shut to him. Only in the true church does Christ rule as head, speak to his people the blessedness of their forgiveness, and open wide the kingdom of heaven to them, so that as victors they may stride in.

Reverend Spronk's ground for unity with other churches and so-called believers must be on something other than the truth. The only unity the church has is in the gospel and the truth that is expressed in the Reformed confessions, which he supposedly subscribes to. The unity cannot be sovereign grace, as he claims, because sovereign grace realizes that oneness with the universal church and the church institute. The only ground he can possibly have is common grace. God has a certain favor toward all men, and therefore a man has some good in him and some truth. You can have a relationship with him then on that ground. But grace is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works by the Word of truth alone. The Spirit in the believer receives the Word without question, argument, or debate. How can you say that someone has the Spirit and grace of God if he believes, holds to, and promotes the lie or is a member of a church that teaches the lie? You make God a liar then, and you un-God God. And in the end, you show yourself to be of the darkness, and not a child of the light (1 John 1:5–7).

—TDO

Letter from Mr. Tom Bodbyl

January 22, 2025

Dear fellow Saints of First Reformed Protestant Church,

It has been a burden of heart and conscience that I need to confess my sin of participating in rescinding the membership of Brandon and Alana in our church. Also,

I participated in the sinful deposition of a faithful elder, Henry Kamps. I have confessed this before God and he has forgiven me and these fellow saints have also forgiven me. God has given me no peace in this whole matter of the Oostras. What I had believed from the very beginning has

never left me, no matter how I tried to suppress it.

In the deposition of elder Kamps, the charge was that he separated the people from Christ. Schism. However, if the consistory unjustly removed these members from the church, then the sin lies with the consistory. Brandon and Alana had clean papers when they asked for membership in First.

Many of you are not aware that after the consistory rescinded the membership of Brandon and Alana, I submitted a protest (see attached) to the consistory. I was deeply troubled by this decision as the consistory can attest to. In the interest of unity in the work of the consistory I withdrew my protest. God and my children are witness that I did everything to convince them and myself that the consistory's decision was right and just.

I believed that in some way this couple could work out what was separating them from being allowed membership in the church. I encouraged Brandon to go to Second and in love for him they would work toward reconciliation. However, it became plain that Second had no interest in reconciliation. Why would Second *ask* them what sin they committed? What did Second expect for an answer from this couple? Brandon and Alana didn't believe they had sinned in anything. Was this Second's approach because they knew that they were never members of their congregation, and they knew they had no authority over them? If they were under the authority of Second, then Second surely would have called Brandon and Alana to repent for the sins Second believed they had committed. After all, they must answer to Second's consistory. This is love for the member that sins. What a cruel way to treat the people of God.

There are protests before the consistory of First right now that have convinced me of the error of rescinding their membership. One protest reads in part, "As far as the creeds teach, there are only 2 ways out of the church; a member separates himself from it (Belgic Confession Art. 28) or the member is excommunicated out of it (Belgic Confession Art. 30)." The main ground for rescinding membership was a precedent in the PRC's history in the early nineteen sixties. The precedent that was set in the PRC had no creedal grounds. This decision to rescind membership has now brought controversy into our congregation. This controversy must be settled with the use of the creeds. Where in the creeds does it say you may rescind membership? It doesn't and it can't be found. It is not Reformed.

Second RPC communicated to First RPC that in their judgement, the matter with Brandon and Alana was finished due to their impenitence. First RPC joined in judging them to be impenitent. Brandon and Alana were never charged with sin by a consistory nor were they brought before a consistory to defend themselves regarding the charges. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 43

teaches that we may not, "...join in condemning any man rashly or unheard." Where is the official record of Brandon and Alana's testimony regarding the charges of sin that were made against them? Were they "heard" by any consistory? This was a violation of the 9th commandment in that they were denied the right to defend themselves before the church and God. I ask you, is this how Christ operates in his church? The world at least affords a man or a woman the right of defending themselves in a court of law. A man is innocent until proven guilty.

The real issue in the controversy is the doctrine of the antithesis and how this is lived out by the believer. What is being taught is that there are certain rules one must follow in living with others, especially Protestant Reformed people. If you question and discuss the real possibility that you have disagreement with the application of the antithesis as it's being taught in the churches, then there is no room for you to hold your own view and how you believe the Spirit leads you in your personal life with others.

In Rev. Langerak's lecture on Belgic Confession Article 28 he taught, "...they [members of the church] attack the ministry of the word and the ministers of the word and they attack the doctrine [antithesis] of the church... they do it in their families. That's a wicked kind of membership. They don't have membership in the church. They're really dead branches [reprobate families] already. They need to be cut out." You may not disagree with how the antithesis is being applied. Proof of this is that there was a protest before the consistory objecting to the application of the antithesis as it was applied in the life of a believer. This member was immediately counter charged by First's consistory and put under discipline. Even in the PRC they weren't this cruel. Regarding the rescinding of membership, it was preached by Rev. Ophoff in the sermon titled *Honoring Authority*, that "The council stands ready to teach. But know this and this is a warning, (more like a threat—tb) if you're obstinate in this and dig your heels in this, the consistory is going to deal with this....and we're going to begin disciplining." This means that no one may disagree with the decision of the church. The consistory is right no matter what and we will put you outside the kingdom of Christ if necessary. This is lording over the people and denies the office of all believer and his right of appeal. (see Article 31 of the Church Order)

I love the doctrine of double predestination. It glorifies God as God. He alone is sovereign over all creatures and especially over all mankind. He elects and he reprobates. As Rev. Vos taught us, you cover your mouth at the doctrine of reprobation and stand in awe of it. I am not called, nor do I have any desire, to tell you who the reprobate are. This need to judge the souls of people as elect or reprobate is foundational to the antithesis in the RPC and how it affects your living with others. Once you have determined one are reprobate, why would you bother to have anything

to do with them? You certainly wouldn't fellowship with them or bring them the gospel. If you don't agree with the doctrine of the antithesis as it's being preached, then you are reprobate. Rev. Ophoff prayed on Sunday morning (1-22-2025) "Cast them from us. Our enemies seek our life....Lord consume them in thy wrath." Why? Because he believes they are reprobate. Only the reprobate are the objects of God's wrath. One would think that a shepherd would pray that God would be merciful to these "wayward" sheep and that it's the congregation's heart felt desire that they return.

What the members of the RPC churches need to understand is that if you disagree with the applications of the antithesis as it's taught in the churches, you hate the gospel. Your end is destruction. And worse, you are reprobate if you leave the RPC.

Rev. Langerak and Rev. Ophoff have no fear of taking to themselves what is only the sovereign right of God in judging souls eternally. I am not interested in a front

row seat in the judgment. However, this judging of eternal souls by men will be judged by God. Whether this judging the souls of men by mere mortals will be judged in Christ or apart from Christ is God's judgment to make.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?" Matthew 5: 43-46

It is for these reasons that I can no longer remain a member of these churches.

With grief,
Tom Bodbyl

REPLY TO MR. BODBYL

I am thankful that Mr. Bodbyl finally wrote what he has believed all along. I do not intend to answer his letter point by point, not because I cannot answer but in the interest of addressing the more glaring doctrinal problems with his letter.

I thought that he was a stalwart defender of the truth and that he needed time to work through and process all that had happened in First church over the past year. However, I believed that he stood with me doctrinally. During his time in office, I highly valued his advice and counsel. I loved him as a good friend and a close companion. What is surprising and shocking to me is just how much of the truth he has pushed aside and how much of the lie he now reveals that he believes. His confession is now the deceptive, corrupt, and carnal document of the "Call to Freedom and Unity in Christ." This document that he currently puts his name behind is not only not Reformed, but it is un-Christian and ungodly. Perhaps I will address that document soon.

Mr. Bodbyl writes as if he were not in the consistory room for the past year. He acts like he might have put up some sort of fight for what he believes is the truth. But he was there for all the discussions and deliberations in the consistory room. He read and saw all the reports. I even put him on the committee on Sunday, October 20, 2024, to draft the advice for the suspension of then Elder Henry Kamps. Mr. Bodbyl heard Mr. Kamps lie through his teeth about what happened in the consistory

room all those months. He nailed Mr. Kamps to the wall for attempting to claim conscience when he refused to shake my hand after the sermon that morning, whereas the day before, Mr. Kamps of his own volition promised not to protest the rescinding of Brandon and Alana Oostrá's membership. For a time Mr. Bodbyl appeared to be one of the strongest men in the consistory room. And now he has turned around and apologized for rescinding Brandon and Alana's membership, for his part in deposing Mr. Henry Kamps, and for being too harsh to the Protestant Reformed Churches. Still worse, he has turned his back on the preaching in the church of Jesus Christ, the preaching of election and reprobation and of the antithesis.

Duplicitous and double minded. He is unstable in all his ways (James 1:8).

Ultimately, Mr. Bodbyl has rejected the word of God as it came on October 20, 2024, in the sermon titled "The Carnal Church." He never should have shaken my hand. Now he has to say that the sermon was not the word of God. He, along with Mr. Elijah Roberts, has to call God's word a lie and a trap. In the consistory room on October 19, 2024, in my naïveté, I believed that we as consistory members were all one—at least that is what men spoke with their mouths. All the elders confessed that we were carnal in our decisions. We all confessed that we were respecters of persons. I confessed that I had been carnal in not preaching sooner regarding the controversy. I told the consistory that

I was going to preach on 1 Corinthians 3:1–4 and preach regarding the controversy after months of fighting in the consistory room. I laid out the content of what the sermon was going to be, and there were no objections. God’s word was no trap to get Mr. Henry Kamps, but now Mr. Bodbyl has to confess that the sermon was a trap.

The spiritual reality of what happened at First Reformed Protestant Church is that men and women would not become nothing before the awesome majesty and holiness of Jehovah God. Christ made them nothing—sinners and ungodly. And men hated that word. Men were offended by Christ’s word that they are nothing, having a zeal for their names and reputations. They informally charged the preaching as being comfortless, abusive, Christless, and Spiritless. They tried to kill the prophet and to make his message ineffective. Jehovah got tossed aside by about half of my congregation at First church because in the deepest recesses of their hearts, those who sat under my preaching believe themselves to be something. They hold to their works, religiousness, well-ordered lives, and piety, but they are as shallow as mud puddles. They have no zeal for the holiness of God’s name, his absolute righteousness, his infinite wisdom, his boundless grace, and his resplendent glory. They are zealous for their own names but not for God’s truth. They are offended by the preaching but not by the lie. They are tolerant of their friends and family who worship an idol but are intolerant of the holiness of God’s name when they are exposed in their carnal relationships. That is true of Mr. Bodbyl, and it is written all over his letter.

Those who are offended by God’s holy name and blinding light are as such because they are darkness and walk in darkness.

5. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
6. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:
7. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:5–7)

Mr. Bodbyl writes,

Where is the official record of Brandon and Alana’s testimony regarding the charges of sin that were made against them? Were they “heard” by any consistory? This was a violation of the 9th commandment.

He brings this up now, after he has left, while doing nothing when he was actually an elder in the church.

What Mr. Bodbyl has conveniently forgotten is that this whole matter of stealing, which the consistory was informed

of by a letter from Mr. Dillon Altena in February 2024, was actively being buried in the consistory room under the auspices of Matthew 18 up to the point of the consistory’s receiving Brandon and Alana Oostra as members. The line was, if there was a sin, it was private. And if it was private, Mr. Altena had the obligation to go the way of Matthew 18. The consistory was handcuffed in the consistory room by Mr. Kamps, and Mr. Bodbyl for that matter, from doing any investigation into the matter because in their minds that would have been entering into the case, a supposed violation of the Church Order and the principle of Matthew 18. They claimed that the consistory had no business talking with the consistory of Second Reformed Protestant Church, Mr. Altena, or Brandon and Alana Oostra. In the meantime First’s consistory should receive the Oostras as members. Then if there were any charges, they had to come to First church by way of Matthew 18. “We must not enter in” was the sound heard from the consistory from February until we finally rescinded their membership.

But Mr. Bodbyl makes an important admission in his letter to this effect, that the consistory should have received the Oostras’ testimony. And by that he admits, unintentionally, that for him it never was a Matthew 18 case to begin with. His admission betrays a double standard. What I hear in Mr. Bodbyl’s letter now is the same argument of Mr. Kamps. Just prior to taking the decision to rescind membership, Mr. Kamps finally advocated for meeting with Brandon and Alana Oostra to hear their side of the story. But that would not have been following Matthew 18. It was either a Matthew 18 case, or it was not a Matthew 18 case. Mr. Bodbyl’s line in his letter, along with Mr. Kamps’ line in the consistory room, to have the Oostras speak betrays their position that they knew that the case was not a matter of Matthew 18. This was a public case all along, and it should have been treated as such from the beginning.

Mr. Bodbyl then continues to slander the church and fuels a narrative of events that is simply unfounded.

You may not disagree with how the antithesis is being applied. Proof of this is that there was a protest before the consistory objecting to the application of the antithesis as it was applied in the life of a believer. This member was immediately counter charged by First’s consistory and put under discipline. Even in the PRC they weren’t this cruel.

I assume that Mr. Bodbyl is speaking there about Mr. Gord Schipper’s protest. Mr. Schipper’s protest was against the decision to rescind Brandon and Alana Oostra’s membership at First church. That was the thrust of his protest. But at the end of his protest, he leveled charges of sin, totally unrelated to his protest, against me,

Rev. Nathan Langerak, and the consistory of First. He also charged Reverend Langerak with teaching false doctrine and bringing the church back under the bondage of the law. Mr. Schipper made those charges without any attempt to base his accusations in scripture or the confessions. At the close of his letter, Mr. Schipper wrote that if the consistory did not do what was right, may there be a mighty battle. What is unbelievable is that Mr. Bodbyl was in the consistory room for part of this case. Men explained to Mr. Bodbyl at least twice why Mr. Schipper had to retract his baseless and unproven charges of sin before the consistory could enter into his protest.

The consistory then sent a committee to meet with Mr. Schipper to tell him to retract the charges of sin in his protest. The meeting lasted fourteen minutes, and then Mr. Schipper got up and walked out. Two days later First received legal notices and a threat of litigation. At our consistory meeting the next day, the elders demanded and required Mr. Schipper to appear before the consistory. His response was, "I prefer not to meet at this time." The consistory was not asking; the elders were demanding it, and Mr. Schipper said no to Jesus Christ. It was complete and utter defiance against the rule of Christ in his church. Mr. Schipper then proceeded to dig in his heels on the charges he had made, and by the following week he was placed under silent censure for impenitent sin.

Did we answer his protest? Did First church crush the office of all believer? No, and not at all. In Mr. Schipper's mind, he had already judged the consistory and two ministers in the denomination as deceivers. How could he reasonably expect an answer to his protest? We simply could not enter into his protest until he retracted his baseless and unfounded claims that stood unrelated to his protest.

What about Mr. Elijah Roberts' protest and documents? Did we trample on his right to protest? After he sent his documents to the consistory, he never shadowed a door at church, and then he left with his spurious act of separation retreat.

The various other protests that the consistory of First church has received came as actual protests, not backdoor charges of sin and baseless accusations. The protest from which Mr. Bodbyl quoted we have no problem answering whatsoever. It was a well-written and well-articulated protest that deserves a response. In the meantime Mr. Bodbyl should stop spreading the lie that First church has rejected the office of all believer.

Mr. Bodbyl continues the tale that the office of all believer is being trampled on:

This means that no one may disagree with the decision of the church. The consistory is right no matter what and we will put you outside the kingdom of Christ if necessary. This is lording over the people

and denies the office of all believer and his right of appeal. (see Article 31 of the Church Order)

I want to give some more facts regarding the protests the consistory has received. Mr. Bodbyl mentions that the antithesis is the issue. I agree. Over the past months my preaching and Reverend Langerak's preaching have been slandered as legalistic or, more deceptively, as leading people to legalism. One would think there would be piles of protests on the desk of the consistory regarding driving the sheep, comfortless sermons, and legalism. Let me clarify to the readership how many protests have been received against my preaching. There have been no protests concerning the content of my preaching of the antithesis, of driving the sheep, of being Christless, or of being comfortless. The doctrine of First Reformed Protestant Church as proclaimed in the pulpit is the doctrine of heaven, and against it no man can stand. The powerful testimony is the deafening silence of the lack of protests. As such, Mr. Bodbyl and others who have left may not claim how loving and nice they are. Their actions have shown nothing but hatred for the neighbor.

I taught the calling of the antithesis as our part in the covenant in accordance with the third section of the baptism form, that we are "by God through baptism, admonished of, and obliged unto new obedience, namely, that we...forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life" (*Confessions and Church Order*, 258). I preached the calling of the antithesis as *bring the word* with all its force to your Protestant Reformed friends and family. Negatively, do not dull the edges of the truth for the sake of holding onto an earthly relationship. I preached that in the closest connection with the gospel of the antithesis that God has made you his friend in Jesus Christ and therefore an enemy of the world. I set before the eyes of the congregation the holiness of God's name, and men rejected God.

Previously the opponents had said that the application of the preaching should be left broad and not too specific, so that the Spirit could apply the word to each individual's heart (or so they could decide whether the sermon applied to them or not). Then they clamored that the preaching was ambiguous. That was actually the only trap being laid by anyone in all this. They wanted the preaching to give a list of dos and don'ts for them in their carrying out of the antithesis, but that would be to go beyond the bounds of scripture.

That I prayed in a congregational prayer that God would consume the church's enemies in his wrath is a thoroughly scriptural idea. Strikingly, this language is found in many psalms. I simply was praying Psalm 59:13, which was the context for the sermon that I had preached the week before. The irony is that Mr. Bodbyl's advice to me when I was in seminary was to "pray the psalms." This

idea is also confessional. Those who heard the word and rejected the word have been set outside the kingdom of heaven by Christ in his holy gospel, and thus are exposed to the wrath of God, so long as they are unconverted (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 84, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 118). Mr. Bodbyl's criticism is not leveled against me, but it is leveled against God's word, and he can take up his quarrel with God. For all his claims to love the doctrine of double predestination, Mr. Bodbyl's criticism of not praying for "wayward" sheep is a thinly veiled attack against election and reprobation. For months I prayed for unity and peace among the flock. I preached the word of God as the only thing that could unite us. God placed a division that he was determined not to heal. To believe election theology is to ground every result and action of man in the manifestation of God's eternal will. Men took themselves out of the blessed fellowship of the church and joined themselves to a carnal organization whose only unity is the hatred of the truth.

The gospel came to men in power and in truth, and men turned their backs on it. God, throughout time and history and especially in controversy, is always realizing in his church his eternal decree of election and reprobation. That is exactly what took place at First these many months. God exposed men as carnal and hypocritical, as wolves and as goats, not as wayward sheep, as Mr. Bodbyl claims. The minister's job at that point is to drive such men away in no uncertain terms for the protection of God's flock over against the evil influence of such men.

The minister contents himself with God's twofold work. Sometimes God's commission of a minister is not to gather the multitudes but to lay waste the land in judgment, and by that same judgment to save a small remnant.

8. I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.
9. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.
10. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.
11. Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate,
12. And the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.
13. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak,

whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof. (Isa. 6:8–13)

God answered months of personal and congregational prayers but not according to my will. My will is that we all would be one together, speaking the same thing. But God exposed men and pulled the mask off many hypocrites in the church. That was the way God revealed that he was going to give healing to a congregation that was convulsing from the wicked counsels, tricks, and devices of ungodly men.

The first series I preached at First was on Hebrews 11. Hebrews was written to the Jews, who were tempted to turn back from the truth. Did Mr. Bodbyl hear and believe a word of it? Hebrews 10:38 reads, "Now the just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Mr. Bodbyl has turned back on Christ and the truth. He has put away his big, shiny sword against the lie and against the Protestant Reformed Churches. He has rejected the antithesis as it was preached and taught out of God's word and the confessions without one time interacting with my preaching and writing.

I have an evaluation and a judgment that I must make about those who left and stand with the enemies of the truth against the church of Jesus Christ. Am I judging eternal destinies? Am I taking from God his sovereign and sole right to judge men's souls? Not at all. But I am judging their walks according to the scriptures. I am going as far as the scriptures reveal. By the pattern of life a man lives, I can say that he is an enemy of the cross, and the way he walks is to destruction if he does not repent and remains impenitent and unbelieving.

18. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ:
19. Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. (Phil. 3:18–19)

Those who have left the Reformed Protestant Churches over the antithesis participate in a new worship of Jehovah in Dan and Bethel after their imaginations. And appropriately, the Assyrians will descend from the north and swallow them up.

As to desiring a "front row seat" at the final judgment, at which Mr. Bodbyl scoffs, I long for that day as an object of ardent hope and comfort to me. This is confessional:

The consideration of this judgment is justly terrible and dreadful to the wicked and ungodly; but most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and the elect; because then their full deliverance shall be perfected, and there they shall receive the fruits of their labor and trouble which they have

borne. Their innocence shall be known to all, and they shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and tormented them in this world; and who shall be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and being immortal, shall be tormented in that everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.

But on the contrary, the faithful and elect shall be crowned with glory and honor, and the Son of God will confess their names before God His Father and His elect angels; all tears shall be wiped from their eyes; and their cause, which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God. And for a gracious reward, the Lord will cause them to possess such a glory as never entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our

Lord. (Belgic Confession 37, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 78–80)

Now there are only lies and slander against the church and her ministers, consistories, and members—but ultimately against Christ and his truth. But when that righteous judge shall come, our cause, which is his cause, which men declared heretical and impious, finally will be vindicated before the entire rational, moral world. That will be a day of awesome power. It will be a great and glorious day of the Lord when God will judge the world by his gospel. By faith the knowledge of that day gives me the strength to persevere and continue until the end. I want all that took place in the first year of my ministry, in the history of the Reformed Protestant Churches, and in the church of all ages finally to be revealed before all men. I want my innocence to be known to all and to see the terrible vengeance that God shall execute on the wicked. I want my cause, which is condemned by many wicked men, to be known to be the cause of the Son of God. I can say that I want to stand there confidently and boldly through faith in Christ.

Why cannot Mr. Bodbyl say that?

—TDO

OUR DOCTRINE

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

SACRIFICES (8): SHADOW-ATONEMENT

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

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. —Hebrews 10:1–4

No Contradiction

The opening verses in Hebrews 10 state strongly and expressively that it was impossible for a sinner's conscience to be cleansed by the blood that was spilled in the courts of the earthly sanctuary. On the

old testament feast days, wherein the floor of the outer court became a bloodbath and the streets of Jerusalem ran red, all the blood of bulls and goats availed nothing as pertaining to the sinner's conscience. Though there were millions of gallons of blood collected by the priests over

the fifteen hundred years that transpired from Moses to Christ, not one guilty conscience was delivered from the burden of guilt by that animal blood.

But it is not enough to say that the bloody sacrifices of the law never cleansed a sinner's conscience. What Hebrews 10 teaches is that those sacrifices only aggravated one's consciousness of sin. For the epistolist—with his eye upon those chief bloody sacrifices offered on the day of atonement—says that “in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.” The very performance of those sacrifices left the Israelite with only a greater impression of how terrible his sins and miseries were. Therefore, not only the moral law but also the ceremonial law made abundantly clear to the Israelite that he was an ungodly sinner.

Under the ceremonies of the law, the Israelite was confronted at every turn in life with this reality: I am not a good person. The law made sure of it.

In addition to the sacrifices that an Israelite was required to bring on the annual feast days and the sacrifices that he was required to bring for his many transgressions, the law also demanded that an Israelite bring bloody sacrifices for other events in his life—such as when his wife bore a child, if he was healed of leprosy, if a plague was cleansed from his house, if he contracted some disease that produced a running issue from his flesh, or if his wife experienced some abnormally long discharge of blood. And even if the law did not require the Israelite to bring a bloody sacrifice to the altar, then the law had a host of ways to make him ceremonially unclean and demanded that he wash himself.

Thus the ceremonies of the law only reminded an Israelite that he was a disease-ridden and sin-infested creature. He was the corrupt offspring of a corrupt stock. He was ungodly. The law entered that the offense might abound.

And it was impossible that the blood of bullocks and goats should ease the sinner's conscience because it was impossible that the blood of bullocks and of goats should avail by taking away such sins.

But does not the epistolist state something contrary to what God told his people in the law? Did not God assure his people that when they presented their animals at God's altar and placed their hands upon the heads of those animals that those animals would be accepted to make atonement for their sins? Did not God say that “the priest shall make an atonement for him [who through ignorance sinned against any of the commandments of Jehovah], and it shall be forgiven him” (Lev. 4:31)? Or what about God's testimony on the day of atonement that “the priest [shall] make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD” (16:30)? If words have any meaning, then the

ceremonial law taught that bloody sacrifices made atonement for sin.

Furthermore, in last month's article I asserted that *samak*—the imposition of hands upon the head of the animal—transferred the sinner's guilt to the sacrificial victim. That *samak* effected a transfer of guilt is clearly stated in the law for the day of atonement. The high priest, while pressing his hands upon the head of the live goat, was to confess the sins of Israel, “putting them upon the head of the goat,” so that this goat would “bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited” (Lev. 16:21–22). But if it was impossible for bullocks and goats to take away sin, then was not *samak* an empty ritual and devoid of any meaning?

Scripture cannot be broken.

In all of God's words and works and judgments, his lovely unity is always on clear display.

Thus we are obliged to uncover the harmony that exists between the doctrine of the epistolist and the testimony of the Mosaic law.

And the solution is not at all difficult if we keep in mind that the law had “a *shadow* of good things to come, and not the very image of the things” (emphasis added). We must remember that Israel's entire old testament economy was a shadow of heavenly realities and patterned after the spiritual. Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt was a shadow. Israel's passage through the Red Sea was a shadow. Israel's pilgrimage through the waste-howling wilderness was a shadow. Israel's crossing of the Jordan was a shadow. Israel's reception of the land of Canaan was a shadow. So too, the ceremonies of the law were shadows of good things to come.

Therefore, when the ceremonial law speaks of atonement, we must interpret that atonement in light of Hebrews 10. The law speaks of *shadow*-atonement and not of the very image of things. According to the inspired epistolist, we should read Leviticus 1:4 in this way: “He shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make [a shadow] atonement for him.” And we should read Leviticus 4:31 this way: “The priest shall make [a shadow] atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him [in the form of a shadow].” And we should read Leviticus 16:30 this way: “On that day shall the priest make [a shadow] atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD [in the form of a shadow].”

Just as an animal sacrifice was a mere shadow and not the very image of the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world, so the atonement received by means of an animal sacrifice was a mere shadow and not the very image of the atonement at Calvary. We may even say that an Israelite received certain privileges on the basis of that animal sacrifice, but those privileges were always and

only mere shadows and not the very image of the infinite blessings received in Christ.

But to better understand this idea of shadow-sacrifices and shadow-atonements and shadow-privileges—as well as God’s purpose with them—it would be profitable for us to first study them in connection with the first pass-over in the land of Egypt.

A Simple Analogy

If we trace Israel’s steps back from the base of Sinai to the eve of their departure from Egypt, we find Moses standing before Pharaoh to announce the last of the ten strokes that would be inflicted upon Egypt.

To this Pharaoh, God came with the terrors of death, causing Pharaoh to sit for three days in thick darkness. This Pharaoh had also just heard from Moses that if Israel was going to worship God in the wilderness, then God required his people to bring all their cattle with them into the wilderness to serve him. And holding the truth of God down in unrighteousness, this Pharaoh thought within himself, “Who is the Lord?” Then in a fit of rage against God, he screeched at Moses to depart: “Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die” (Ex. 10:28). But Moses lingered for a few moments in Pharaoh’s presence to utter the Lord’s pronouncement of doom:

4. Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt:
5. And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts.
6. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more.
7. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.
8. And all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. (Ex. 11:4–8)

Scripture does not record Pharaoh’s response, but in his heart we can hear these words: “So let it be.” For that

heart God hardened. That heart God hardened because in his marvelous sovereignty God had raised up Pharaoh for this cause, even to show his power in Pharaoh and to multiply wonders in the land of Egypt. Pharaoh’s rebellion against the word of God was fulfilled and judgment had to come.

And through that judgment God redeemed his Zion: an event so monumental that it would forever determine Israel’s calendar.¹

After Moses and Aaron departed from Pharaoh, the Lord gave to them the institution of the passover. The Lord required that each household of Israel take an unblemished, year-old male from either the sheep or the goats. On the evening of their departure, the Israelites had to slaughter those animals, consume their roasted flesh, and smear their blood around the doors of every house. And when the destroyer passed through the streets and fields of Egypt, slaying the firstborn of every man and beast, he spared the households covered in blood:

12. I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.
13. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. (Ex. 12:12–13)

Here we arrive at the point of my analogy.

What was the reason for the destroyer’s passing over the households in Israel but entering every last household in Egypt? Was it because Israel was less deserving of death than the firstborn children of Egypt whom God smote? Not at all. The Israelites were by nature no different than the Egyptians, born dead in trespasses and sins. And Israel would soon learn at the base of Sinai how wretchedly sinful she was. Israel had not distinguished herself above the Egyptians and made herself more worthy of deliverance.

Then what was the reason? The passover blood. God told Israel that when he saw the blood on the Israelites’ doorposts, he would pass over them and the plague would not smite them. Blood was the reason that God spared Israel. If any man in Israel was so foolish as to despise the passover sacrifice that God had provided, then undoubtedly he would have watched his firstborn perish that night. But every household covered in blood escaped the sentence of death.

1 “The LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you” (Ex. 12:1–2).

We must admit that the passover blood availed.

But what did that passover blood avail?

By that blood were the Israelites forgiven of all their iniquities? Were they healed of all their diseases? Were their lives redeemed from destruction? Were they crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercies? Were their mouths satisfied with good things?

No. The proof of this is that many in Israel who were covered by that blood in Egypt later would be slain by God in the wilderness because he had no pleasure in them. Three thousand Israelites would perish by the sword under the shadow of the golden calf. Many would be buried at Kibroth-hattaavah because they lusted again for the dainties of Egypt. The earth would swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, while the fire of the Lord consumed their followers. Many others would die from the fiery serpents. Yea, a whole generation of those who passed through the Red Sea would not enter the land of Canaan because of evil hearts of unbelief, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness.

But then what did that passover blood avail?

In the words of Hebrews 10, that passover blood gave to Israel mere shadows of good things to come and not the very image of things. As a shadow-atonement, that passover blood granted the Israelites shadow-deliverance from the destroyer, shadow-redemption from Egypt, shadow-spoils from their tormenters, shadow-passage through the Red Sea, and a shadow-inheritance in the land of Canaan. Everything about that sacrifice and what it availed was a shadow. But true deliverance from death, true redemption from bondage, true spoils of the heathen, true baptism, and a true inheritance could not be received by that blood, for it is impossible that the blood of bullocks and goats should take away sins.

And what has been said about this passover sacrifice can be easily transferred to the Levitical sacrifices.

Everything about the ceremonial law for bloody sacrifices came in the form of a shadow. The animal that passed under the imposition of hands was accepted to make shadow-atonement. *Samak* was a shadow-imputation of guilt. The sending away of the live goat into the wilderness was a shadow-cleansing of sin from the camp of Israel.

As a shadow-atonement, the death of that animal granted the Israelite certain privileges. Negatively, what

that shadow-atonement afforded can be inferred from the penalty inflicted upon those who were unable to be covered by that shadow-atonement,² namely that “that soul shall be cut off from among the people” (Num. 15:30). In other words, that shadow-atonement granted the sinner momentary deliverance from being cut off from the land of Canaan by physical death. Positively, by that shadow-atonement the sinner could continue to dwell in his shadow-inheritance and appear in the courts of the earthly tabernacle. But what sacrifices availed were merely earthly patterns of something old and perishing. And when an Israelite came to the end of his earthly existence, no amount of animal blood could remove true terrors of death.

What then was the real worth of the bloody sacrifices?

They were shadows that went hand in hand with the spoken word of God.

When God told Israel that the animal that passed under the imposition of the sinner’s hands was accepted to make atonement for him, God spoke the truth. That truth was spoken in the form of shadows. That truth was spoken with a view toward and in the light of good things to come. The word of God went together with the shadow to reveal the very image of things—the body of Jesus Christ. That animal’s bearing of guilt, that animal’s suffering of the penalty of physical death, that ceremonial satisfaction received through the animal’s suffering, that right to dwell in the land of Canaan—they all pointed to the work of Christ and the fruit of his toil.

Only faith could receive this word of God, discerning the dim image of God’s Son through those ceremonial shadows.

And without faith, it is impossible to please God.

What Pleased God

God did not give those sacrifices and ceremonies of the old dispensation so that Israel could lift up herself in worship. God did not give those sacrifices and ceremonies so that Israel could come into God’s presence and say, “I did what you required. I did it correctly. Now you have to bless me.”

But that is exactly what rebellious Israel would always do. Time and again, the Israelites would make their scrupulous observances of the law by which they would be righteous before God. An Israelite would think in his

2 The terrible weakness of the law’s shadow-atonement became apparent when it could only avail for sin committed through ignorance. It did not avail for sins committed presumptuously. (I intend to talk about this difference between sins of ignorance and presumptuous sins in connection with the sin and trespass offerings.) Nor did the shadow-atonement avail for anyone who committed the abominable customs of the heathen nations that dwelt in Canaan—incest, causing children to pass through the fire, or bestiality (Lev. 18). The shadow-atonement did not avail for the child who cursed his parents, for the adulterer, for the homosexual, for a man who slept with his father’s wife, or for the necromancer (Lev. 20). It did not avail for the whorish daughter of a priest (Lev. 21). It did not avail for the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15). In contrast, the true atonement of Jesus Christ—the very image of things—“is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world” (Canons of Dordt 2.3, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 163).

heart, "I brought my sacrifice. I have felt bad for my sin. I have shed some tears. I have confessed my sin. Now I can be assured that all my sins will be forgiven. Now I can know that God shows favor to me."

And God had no pleasure in such sacrifices. This was his word to such a proud people:

10. Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.
11. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he goats.
12. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?
13. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.
14. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.
15. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (Isa. 1:10-15)

"Your worship is iniquity!" That is what Israel's worship so often became. All of the Israelites' scrupulous observances of the law were wicked. It was all wickedness because it was that by which they would be righteous before God. It was wicked because they did it to be pleasing to God. It was wicked because they did it to be blessed by God.

And the rulers always were cruel in that worship too. "Your hands are full of blood!" By that worship they heaped burdens of guilt upon the people and never removed them. The rulers killed souls. They robbed God's people of comfort and hope and joy. They shut the door of the kingdom of heaven against men and forbade them from entering.

Thus God's word to them was, "Repent, ye rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrah!"

Compliance to the letter of the law was never pleasing to God. "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering" (Ps. 51:16).

What God always sought was truth. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6).

Truth.

Truth is the perfect harmony between a man and the law of God. Truth is perfect conformity of a man to that

requirement that he must love God and his neighbor.

And God desires truth in the inward parts. Truth is that man must be a God-lover and a neighbor-lover with the totality of his own qualities and powers in body and soul. Truth is the perfection of a man's entire nature. Truth is that a man is perfectly consecrated to God from the heart.

Truth is what God desires. Truth is what delights God. Truth is that in which God has pleasure. The truth that delights God is not trying really hard and doing your best. The truth that God desires is absolute perfection, not only outwardly but also in your inward parts. The truth that God has pleasure in is perfect obedience out of a perfect nature and from a heart that loves God alone.

"Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

"To love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mark 12:33).

And it is only a true man that God will have in his presence for fellowship. God's presence is the presence of the holy and the righteous God. God's presence is the presence of the one whose eyes are purer than to behold iniquity. God's presence is the presence of the one who knows the very thoughts of the heart. Only if truth permeates your entire being, all the way down to your heart, may you stand in God's presence.

Therefore, there is only one thing that God desires, delights in, is pleased with, and is inclined toward: his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The only true man who ever has existed is Jesus Christ. As the epistolist wrote,

5. When he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:
6. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.
7. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. (Heb. 10:5-7)

Jesus Christ is truth, as the only man who was spotless perfection throughout his entire being. Jesus Christ is truth, whose obedience to do the will of God was his meat and drink. Jesus Christ is truth, as the only one who obeyed God as God desired.

And how God delights in him! Christ's obedience was an obedience unto death. For he is the one whom God appointed as head of his elect people to fulfill God's will concerning those people. Christ took all of their rebellion and all of their wickedness and iniquity. He made

atonement for those who are not true men but who are the enemies of God. Christ satisfied God's justice in their behalf. Christ justified the ungodly. He is the truth.

Thus when God says that he desires truth in the inward parts, what he desires alone is Christ.

And because faith is one's living connection with Jesus Christ, what God desired when a man brought a sacrifice was not the animal but faith.

Faith only knows the truth. That was true of faith in the old dispensation too, even under the forms of shadows. When faith came to the altar of God, faith knew the truth about God, that God by no means acquits the guilty. That faith knew the truth about oneself, that he or she was not a good person but had grossly transgressed the law of God and kept none of his commandments. And when that faith came to the altar of God, it came as an absolute nothing, empty of all works. That faith came only because it was able to see through those shadows the very image of good things to come: the forgiveness of

iniquities and transgressions and sin in the body of Jesus Christ. And that faith pleased God, because God saw in that faith what delights him: the truth of his Son.

And what that faith received was a conscience cleansed by the blood of the true man and the witness of having his righteousness.

Thus the animal sacrifices and their accompanying rituals were not meaningless. But as shadows, they were fleeting. As shadows, they were quick to disappear when God raised up his Son from the dead, and that Son shone forth in all his blazing, noonday glory. And as shadows, those animal sacrifices were insubstantial, for you can never lay hold on a shadow. You cannot embrace a shadow. But you can touch and handle the Word of life made flesh. God gave all those sacrifices and ceremonies in the old dispensation to make Israel nothing and to point Israel to Jesus Christ.

—LB

DRY MORSEL

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

THE KNOWLEDGE OF MAN (2): EXPELLED FROM PARADISE

When man received the probationary law in paradise, the imminent reality of his fall was inescapable, otherwise the law would have been given only positively. Adam was commanded not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because he was made with a weakness. The law did not guarantee further perfection and righteousness; rather, as Augustine wrote, "Prohibition increases the desire of illicit action."¹ John Calvin commented that when the law came to man with a threat, it was not enough to maintain man's original rectitude nor to avoid the fall:

Then, by denouncing punishment, he strikes terror, for the purpose of confirming the authority of the law. So much greater, then, is the wickedness

of man, whom neither that kind commemoration of the gifts of God, nor the dread of punishment, was able to retain in his duty.²

Instead of providing a way to higher perfection and eternal bliss for Adam, the law was the strength of sin (1 Cor. 15:56). Man, though perfect, was created with a weakness, that is, he was lapsible. But such a weakness was not present in the person of Jesus Christ. He is *the* perfect Adam. And as to Christ's person, he is pure thesis. It is not superfluous to assert that, unlike Adam, Christ received from God only the positive aspect of the law, that is, to love God with all his heart, strength, soul, and mind. Christ knew no sin. Together with the truth that Christ never sins, cannot sin, and has no sin in him is the

1 Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (NY: The Modern House, 1950), 415.

2 John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, The Geneva Series of Commentaries, trans. and ed. John King (1847; repr., UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 127.

idea that *he does not know sin* as the law is the knowledge of sin. Prohibition gives the creature the knowledge of what sin is. Jesus Christ knows no prohibition. In the fellowship of the triune God, there is no prohibition. Only a lapsible creature deserves a prohibition. The law was like a fence restricting man within the will of God and guarding him from going outside that will. Ever since man's creation, his liberty has consisted in the will of God. To do anything contrary to that will is slavery and imprisonment.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not a lapsible creature. He is perfect—the highest perfection of human life. God never commands Christ, “Thou shalt not...” God's Son in human flesh as the mediator does not have a weak nature nor a tendency to transgress God's will. On the contrary, man—a mere creature, though perfectly made in the image of his creator—has a weak nature and a tendency to disobey. Only Christ is pure and perfect in the highest sense.³

Since man could fall into sin due to the weakness of his nature, he actually fell. He was created above the earthly creation, but he immediately fell into sin and subjected the entire creation to sin. He took heed to the lies of the devil and made himself the devil's servant. After despising the image of God with which man was created, he willingly clothed himself with the image of the devil. God commanded man to love God with all man's being and to serve God alone, but through the instigation of the devil, man fell drastically and became totally depraved and wicked. Since the fall man cannot choose God and his Christ. And part of man's misery is his inability to do good.

Evil upon evil is the life of man since the fall. Whatever he thinks and wills serves only his flesh. No mere creature can save man from this misery. By nature man is hopeless and destitute of righteousness and holiness. Ultimately, man became totally depraved. Judgment came upon him and his posterity—as the juridical head of the human race, his sin is reckoned to every human being. Life in man is death. He is not in any sense a friend of God; by nature it is impossible for man to have fellowship with God. The tree of life, where God had communed with man, became distant scenery because of sin. Man became so wicked that God could no longer have fellowship with him in paradise, and thus man was expelled from God's sight—from paradise. Spiritually dead, man became alienated from God. Being spiritually dead, what

remains is man's natural state. Man is now rightly called the “natural man,” who “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14).

Prof. D. Engelsma asserted the same truth:

When Adam sinned, he separated himself from God, the good One and the source of all goodness. Yes, and God punished Adam by banishing him from Himself, particularly from God revealed in the tree of life. Adam lost the goodness with which God had created him. Adam lost all the spiritual abilities with which he was enabled and ennobled by his creation. Adam's nature became wicked. His entire human being became incapable of any good. Adam died spiritually. Adam was a dead stick on the ground in paradise, separated from the vine, who is God.⁴

Sin is always committed in relationship to God.⁵ As the covenant God, Jehovah designed the creation and put man in paradise in a relationship to God. All things were made not in separate existence from their creator but always dependent upon the life that God eternally has in himself. Thus all things move and live in relationship to him, so that when the moral, ethical creatures in heaven and on earth fell, the sin committed ultimately was against God *alone*. The psalmist is convicted of this when he confesses before Jehovah, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Ps. 51:4).

Natural men have the “work of the law” written in their hearts, that is, their consciences bear witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accuse or else excuse one another (Rom. 2:15). The conscience of man is the tribunal where God sits as judge, condemning every work of man. Man does not have the *law of God* written in his heart. Only those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of Christ have the law written in their hearts. Rather, the conscience of man accuses him day and night. And it will surely drag him down to utter judgment when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead and all the books are opened (Rev. 20:12). Man's conscience will be opened like a book, and plainly written there will be his guilt and transgressions and all his works that were done without faith. All men will be judged according to the work of the law in their hearts. The law surely will be

3 Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 244.

4 David J. Engelsma, “Total Depravity,” in Herman Hanko and David J. Engelsma, in *The Five Points of Calvinism* (UK: British Reformed Fellowship, 2008), 74.

5 Herman Hanko, “Total Depravity,” in Herman Hanko, Homer Hoeksema, Gise Van Baren, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association and, 1976), 14.

against them on that day because Jesus Christ is not their righteousness and justification.

Though man has the vestiges of the knowledge of God (Belgic Confession 14; Canons of Dordt 3–4.4), he cannot discern his errors. “Instead of knowledge of God there has come darkness and the lie.”⁶ Man cannot see his misery and depravity before the just, holy, and merciful God in the sense that man cannot repent of his sinful condition nor humble himself because of that misery. David needed the wonder of grace to realize his sins and to recognize that every sin that he committed was against God alone (Ps. 51). Nevertheless, the conscience of man, even apart from grace, is enough to testify against man that his works are wicked and disapproved of God. Man’s conscience leaves him without excuse because God sits there convicting him to death. Because man has no grace and faith of Jesus Christ, man suppresses those vestiges of the knowledge of God in order to remain willingly in darkness despite the coming judgment upon all reprobate, wicked men and all workers of iniquity.⁷ Despite the knowledge of the coming judgment, he still develops in sin. “Sin is not a substance.”⁸ That sin is not a substance means that it does not exist in itself, but sin develops in a substance with a moral, rational soul—man—so that sin develops according to the operation of the nature of the creature.

This is explained simply by Rev. Nathan Langerak:

In that extreme wickedness man can also grow and develop. Man’s depravity is his spiritual death. Just as a dead corpse can rot, so can the totally depraved sinner become worse in his sin. As a rebel against God, man assiduously cultivates his life of rebellion and sin, testing his life apart from God in the ways of wickedness, and advancing in it both personally and socially until the cup of iniquity is full.⁹

Man cannot escape the fact that his sins are against God alone because man’s fall into sin did not separate him from God in the *absolute* sense. Though spiritually separated from God and his intimate, covenant fellowship of love, man is still related to God. Fundamentally, man stands related to God by virtue of his creation.¹⁰ No creature exists apart from his creator. Man remains and will continue to remain related to God; however, man is

no longer God’s friend-servant but his enemy who only exists in relationship to God as his creator and judge. The relationship radically changed into the complete opposite of friendship.

This was also the assertion of Hoeksema and Danhof:

The sinner is an enemy of God, and apart from regeneration, he does not allow himself to be changed into a friend of God. He is also treated by God as an enemy.¹¹

Man became destitute of that intimate fellowship he once had with Jehovah in paradise. Man spiritually died immediately and was expelled from paradise where Jehovah had communed with him in all liberty and grace. And this alienation from God is the source of death in man.¹² For to be in intimate communion with God is life. God is a covenant God in himself, and his harmonious life was revealed to man as communion with God in paradise at the tree of life, which was comparable to the holy of holies in the temple.¹³ As bearer of the image of God, life for man is God himself.¹⁴ But because of sin, man died spiritually and was alienated.

Threatened by death—“for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17)—Adam experienced death because God would never let sin go unpunished, for “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Grammatically, the Hebrew word construction in Genesis 2:17 suggests that more than one death was declared. The word תָּמִת (mooth), which means *to die*, is not in the dual form but is repeated in the very last part of the verse to indicate more than one sense of the word “die.” God said, “For in the day thou eat from it, *dying thou shalt die*.” It was clear to Adam that this death was more than a physical death. It was clear that it was more than an annihilation of earthly existence. Rather, it included also spiritual death, that according to which Adam became liable to physical and eternal death.

Augustine commented on this probationary command of God to Adam, asserting that more than one death was inflicted on man because of his disobedience:

When, therefore, God said to that first man whom he had placed in Paradise, referring to the forbidden fruit, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” that threatening

6 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 1:353.

7 Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof, *Sin and Grace* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2003), 140–43.

8 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:352.

9 Nathan J. Langerak, “Man’s Depravity: Total,” *Standard Bearer* 90, no. 15 (May 1, 2014): 345.

10 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:314.

11 Hoeksema and Danhof, *Sin and Grace*, 144.

12 Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, 127.

13 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:320.

14 Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 260.

included not only the first part of the first death, by which the soul is deprived of God; nor only the subsequent part of the first death, by which the body is deprived of the soul; nor only the whole first death itself, by which the soul is punished in separation from God and from the body; —but it includes whatever of death there is, even to that final death which is called second, and to which none is subsequent.¹⁵

Adam earned these deaths, so to speak, by just one act of disobedience to God’s probationary law. Adam then bore the wrath of God.

Hoeksema and Danhof rightly asserted the same truth concerning the death of man:

This bearing of wrath brings about separation from God. Thus, the essence of death does not consist in the separation of soul and body, or a severing of that which naturally belongs together, nor even in a local separation, but it is a spiritual disharmony with and spiritual separation from God.¹⁶

The paradisaical narrative of Genesis fundamentally includes the historic fall of man. As one can observe, the probationary law, the temptation of the serpent, and the heavy penalty for disobedience all involved eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Some will deny the historicity of the narrative and the inclusion of the prohibited tree. Philo, for instance, believed that the Genesis account concerning creation is figurative or a mere allegory:

And these statements appear to me to be dictated by a philosophy which is symbolical rather than strictly accurate. For no trees of life or of knowledge have ever at any previous time appeared upon the earth, nor is it likely that any will appear hereafter. But I rather conceive that Moses was speaking in an allegorical spirit, intending by his paradise to intimate the dominant character of the soul, which is full of innumerable opinions as this figurative paradise was of trees.¹⁷

Such a denial of the account of Genesis disrupts all the elements and steps of the fall. This was also the assertion of Homer Hoeksema:

We must emphasize from the outset that this tree was a real tree. It was that, or it was nothing. It

was perceptible to the senses, or it had no reality whatsoever; in the latter case, all that stands connected with that tree—the command of the Lord God, the threatened penalty of death, and temptation, the eating of that tree, and sin—have no reality either. Besides, if the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not real, then neither is the tree of life, which is mentioned in the same breath with this tree, nor are all the other trees concerning which we read specifically that the Lord God made them to grow out of the ground and that they were pleasant to the sight and good for food. Every presentation that would deny in one way or another the reality of these trees is a Bible-contradicting and faith-destroying concept. The tree of knowledge of good and evil, unique though it was, was a real tree.¹⁸

To deny that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was real is an absurd notion that makes man to be someone who could not fall since he was given only one choice: to eat freely from every tree of the garden, including the tree of life. Moreover, through the probationary command of God concerning the tree of knowledge, God was working out his good pleasure that man would not remain in paradise and that man and Eden were not the culmination of all things. This signifies that Jesus Christ always has been at the heart of God’s counsel, even during the dreadful event of the fall. According to God’s eternal will and purpose in Jesus Christ, man *had to sin*.

The assertion that man *had to sin* in paradise negates the notion that God is the author of sin. It is such a mystery why the perfectly made servants of God, like Lucifer and his minions, thought so highly of themselves that they rebelled against Jehovah. The same holds true with man, who was made a little lower than the angels but above the earthly creation regarding his dignity and glory. In his pride man thought himself to be as sufficient as God and to decide what was good and evil for himself. The answer to this apparent mystery is unattainable “by inquisitively prying into the secret and deep things of God” (Canons of Dordt 1.12, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 157), but it is revealed to God’s people through his spoken word. However, the purpose of any inquiry always must avoid the hackneyed accusation that God is the author of sin, for he eternally determined the plight of man at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Through the mind of Christ, which is ours by faith, when

15 Augustine, *City of God*, 422.

16 Hoeksema and Danhof, *Sin and Grace*, 95.

17 Philo, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 22.

18 Homer C. Hoeksema, *Unfolding Covenant History: An Exposition of the Old Testament* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 1:114–15.

the knowledge of God makes its ascent, we should hear the voice of Jehovah graciously revealing to us that the secret things belong to him.¹⁹

We are reminded by John Calvin that

although God in all his works does not demonstrate to us by plain and satisfactory arguments his own righteousness, our bounden duty is to be assured that whatever he does, he does righteously. It is therefore our duty to rest in God's will alone. Thus our knowledge of his will and pleasure in whatever he does, although the cause of his doing it should surpass our comprehension, ought to suffice us more than a thousand reasons.²⁰

Faith humbles the believer at the incomprehensibility of the Lord. We should put our shoes from off our feet, for whenever we are in contact with the word of God, the place whereon we stand is holy ground. Thus regarding the origin of sin, the blame should be put solely on man (including the fallen angels), but the explanation always should be provided in relationship to God's sovereign and eternal purpose in Jesus Christ without making God the author of sin. But keep in mind that "the Scriptures teach very plainly that the Lord, although he certainly is not the author of sin, nevertheless controls absolutely all the wicked deeds of evil men."²¹

Why did man fall into sin? According to God's determinate counsel, man *must* sin; God *willed* that man must sin. Is God then the author of sin by ordaining the entrance of sin into paradise?

By no means; but God created man good, and after His own image, in true righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal happiness to glorify and praise Him. (Heidelberg Catechism, A 6, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 85)

Moreover, God commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—all goodness was provided for him!

God created man as a moral, ethical creature so that man might consciously serve and know his creator. Man was put in paradise as a living soul to walk freely on earth and to

subdue all things to serve his creator. But because man was not created to remain forever in that original but earthly rectitude—that is, he was made unto salvation according to God's electing love—man had to then fall into sin, which would happen without the coercion of God.

Regarding the will of God's command, his will was that man not sin. But regarding his eternal counsel and the will of his decree, God nevertheless accomplished what he had determined before time. Adam could ascribe the fall only to his own willful sin. Never did Adam feel that God had forced him to sin. God never forces anyone to sin. Though God sovereignly governs even the hearts of men, he does so without tainting himself with wickedness and deceit. Experience can attest to the fact that the depravity of the whole human being should suffice as the sole source of wickedness.

John Calvin contended that the fall happened according to God's will, but man is the one to be blamed for that wickedness:

Adam could not but fall; according to the foreknowledge, and will of God. What then!—is Adam, on that account, freed from fault? Certainly not. He fell by his own full free will; and by his own willing act.²²

Thus, even in the way of sin, God sovereignly is there, assuring that nothing happens by chance but by his eternal purpose in Jesus Christ.

This is evident by the prophecy of John, when he says, "All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). The book of life is determined through eternal predestination—to which belong divine election and reprobation—and the book was determined even before the foundation of the world. Whether "from the foundation of the world" refers to God's eternal counsel of creation or to the time before the creative act of God clearly makes no difference. The idea is that there are those whose names were not written in the book of life, and we infer not only that the cause was reprobation but also that their reprobation was in relationship to Jesus Christ's death. The Son, according to God's eternal purpose, died exclusively for the elect even before

19 "As to what He doth surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire into it farther than our capacity will admit of, but with the greatest humility and reverence adore the righteous judgments of God which are hid from us, contenting ourselves that we are disciples of Christ, to learn only those things which He has revealed to us in His Word, without transgressing these limits" (Belgic Confession 13, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 37).

20 John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism: God's Eternal Predestination and Secret Providence*, ed. Russell J. Dykstra, trans. Henry Cole (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2009), 109.

21 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:331.

22 John Calvin, *Calvin's Calvinism (First Part): Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. Henry Cole (London: Alexander Macintosh, 1856), 76.

all beginnings. It is quite inescapable that the purpose of the fall in paradise was governed by eternal predestination. And if Christ was slain from the foundation of the world, that means that sin had to enter paradise so that the first man fell together with all his posterity. So the *must* of the fall should be ascribed only to God's eternal counsel and not to his prescriptive will of command given to Adam in paradise in Genesis 2:16–17.

Arthur Pink even contended that Adam *should do* the eating from the forbidden tree.²³

This is also the observation of Robert Harbach in his commentary on Genesis 2:15:

“To keep it” implies a danger which threatened Adam and Eve in the garden. Adam had to protect it against the inroads of God's great adversary. Adam in his work was instructed to watch against the approach of Satan.²⁴

The fall was imminent already when man was put in paradise to keep it. God foreknew that Satan would approach paradise in the very near future. The devil's coming was at hand; he was already on course, and the next event in God's decreed schedule was the fall. The devil's coming was imminent, and Adam would have to protect the cause of God against Satan and sin. But because of unbelief, when the devil arrived at the exact place where

God had given the probationary law to Adam and said to man, “Eat!” man altogether despised his God.

Nevertheless, the fall happened by God's divine providence. By this truth we ever are comforted that even sin was an instrument in the hand of God to bring his elect people into a higher, more blissful life than what our first parents had in paradise. The purpose was always the salvation of Christ's elect church. The elect are saved *in the way of sin* so that Jesus Christ might be exalted as the savior from sin and death. This, I know, is a bold statement but one not made without great cause and care: I contend that Adam sinned for the sake of Jesus Christ—the fall was perfectly and infallibly carried out to serve the cause of God and his Christ.

When Adam sinned he destroyed himself, but his sin was not personally unto eternal death and damnation. “All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:17). I am not minimizing the sin of Adam. God forbid. But he *had to* die to pave the way for a much higher expression of life, which is only found in the last Adam, who was made a quickening spirit. Adam sinned for the sake of Jesus Christ—for the sake of the salvation Christ would bring according to what God had determined in eternity. This I intend to treat next time, the Lord willing.

—JP

RUNNING FOOTMEN

DRAGGING THE ERROR OF PELAGIUS OUT OF HELL

Introduction

God throughout time has created a division in the world—the division between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the truth and the lie, Christ and Belial, the true church and the false church. The difference between the true and the false church is expounded in articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession.

We must be able to discern the lie today, just as our fathers before us have, and join ourselves to the true church, a visible manifestation of the holy, catholic church of all time—a church that proclaims the truth that Christ in his work at the cross has paid for our sins and given to us all our salvation and that man does nothing for salvation, a church that condemns the lie that takes away from Christ's work and gives glory to man.

²³ Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1984), 249.

²⁴ Robert C. Harbach, *Studies in the Book of Genesis* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2001), 67.

The devil has worked from the beginning to deceive man with the lie, and throughout time the devil has made the lie more deceptive.

Lie in Biblical Times

Right away in the garden of Eden, Satan brought in the lie.

4. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:
5. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Gen. 3:4-5)

From the beginning the doctrine of the lie has been man as God, and the result of that doctrine is man's reliance upon himself and his good works for salvation. Adam and his yet unnamed wife built from their own works coverings for their sin (v. 7).

But God did not leave his church lost in the lie. He brought the gospel to his children, and he brought it entirely unconditionally. Adam deserved hell. He had just transgressed the almighty God, yet God brought the mother promise to Adam in 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." God promised Christ. That was all Adam and Eve needed to go forth in comfort. As a sign that one must die to cover sin, a picture of Christ, God also removed their works as a covering for their nakedness, which represented their sin, and slayed an animal to make clothes for them. Their nakedness was covered by the sacrifice of another, picturing Christ's ultimate sacrifice at the cross that covers our sins.

It was not long until a man presented himself as worthy to bring his works to God in worship. Cain brought his labors as a sacrifice, and God said that Cain's sacrifice was not good. By faith Abel offered a blood sacrifice, for he understood that blood was necessary to cover sin.

Throughout the Old Testament idols of all kinds were made, idols that were crafted after man's imagination and desires. Man created a god and worshiped him as he saw fit. Man boasted himself as a god. Yet God repeatedly showed himself to be the only true God. Israel failed to keep the law, and God told his people to be ungodly before him. The Israelites tried to save themselves, to follow the law for their salvation, and to make themselves as God. But God saved his people. God turned them and showed them the sacrifices, which pointed to Christ as their salvation.

Jesus dealt with the Pharisees, the vipers of the new dispensation. The Pharisees would save themselves by their law-keeping. But Christ combatted their doctrine of salvation by works with his words in Matthew 5:20:

"I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." You cannot reach the perfection that God requires in the law. Even if outwardly you could perfectly obey the first nine laws, the tenth breaks into the heart, which is only evil continually. Those who do not perfectly keep every commandment have broken every one of the commandments. Jesus gave the gospel in John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Not long after Jesus' ascension, the Christian church needed to defend against the lie from within its own church doors. The Judaizers, a group of Jews who had converted to Christianity, preached the necessity of circumcision for salvation. They taught the people that "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" and "That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:1, 5). The Judaizers knew of Christ and his work. They agreed that Christ had died for sins and that the Holy Spirit works in God's people. The false doctrine of the false apostles, as Paul called them in Galatians, taught that to be saved, to have righteousness, or to enjoy fellowship with God, one must have faith and obey the law of Moses.

At the Jerusalem Council Peter defended the uncircumcised Gentiles, saying,

8. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;
9. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
11. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. (Acts 15:8-11)

God cares not whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised. God saves sinners through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and frees them from the burden of the law. God knows that Christ bore the yoke of the law and that his people cannot bear that yoke. He put that responsibility onto Christ. Salvation is of Christ and Christ alone; the law bears no part in salvation.

Throughout the Bible we see how the devil worked his same lie of man as God. Adam tried to cover his sin with fig leaves; Cain tried to bring his works; the Pharisees were to be saved by obeying the law; and the Judaizers taught that following the law was necessary for salvation. Yet God preserved his truth.

Early Church History

After the apostles died controversy about the divinity of Christ spread in the Christian church. Arius was a large spreader of the lie that Christ, the Son of God, was not truly God with the Father. For hundreds of years, the church battled over the natures of Christ. The lie spread through the whole church until Athanasius, the one man who believed that Christ was fully God and fully man, seemed to be against the whole church world. Athanasius was brought up by God to uphold the truth of his Son. Athanasius taught that to deny Christ's humanity was to take away Christ's ability fully to complete salvation, making man's work necessary. Man as God. Today, the church has a powerful confession about Christ's natures in the Nicene Creed.

Pelagius taught that man is able to choose good and evil. He is able to choose the good and be saved. Grace was still a part of Pelagius' doctrine as grace that God gave to man to assist him in choosing the good. God helps man by giving grace to him, and with God's help man can be enlightened. God gives grace that enables man to do what man must do to be saved.

Pelagius is mentioned several times in the Reformed creeds. The title of this article is a reference to Canons 2, error and rejection 3:

That Christ, by His satisfaction, merited neither salvation itself for anyone, nor faith, whereby this satisfaction of Christ unto salvation is effectually appropriated; but that He merited for the Father only the authority or the perfect will to deal again with man, and to prescribe new conditions as he might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it therefore might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions.

Rejection: For these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ, do in no wise acknowledge the most important fruit or benefit thereby gained, and bring again out of hell the Pelagian error. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 165)

Pelagius taught that Christ cannot save his people and that salvation depends on man's choosing the good and working out his own salvation. The lie has become that Christ has enabled you; now go and work for your salvation. The lie continues to push down Christ and his work and to raise up man as responsible, making man as God.

Although Rome opposed Pelagius at first, the Roman

Catholics soon found themselves in semi-Pelagianism. This error developed into their doctrine of repentance or, as they call it, "contrition."

Contrition, which holds the first place amongst the aforesaid acts of the penitent, is a sorrow of mind, and a detestation for sin committed, with the purpose of not sinning for the future. This movement of contrition was at all times necessary for obtaining the pardon of sins; and, in one who has fallen after baptism, it then at length prepares for the remission of sins, when it is united with confidence in the divine mercy, and with the desire of performing the other things which are required for rightly receiving this sacrament.¹

The devil brought in the doctrine that repentance must come before God forgives. Repentance is "necessary for obtaining the pardon of sins." You are saved by faith and repentance. Christ forgives you, but you just need repentance to have forgiveness.

John Calvin, by God's sovereign plan, brought a reformation to the church. He brought back the truth of forgiveness by faith alone and the proper place of repentance.

From this doctrine [of the kingdom of God], as its source, is drawn the exhortation to *repentance*. For John [the Baptist] does not say [in Matthew 3:2], "Repent ye, and in this way, *the kingdom of heaven* will afterwards be *at hand*;" but first brings forward the grace of God, and then exhorts men to *repent*. Hence it is evident, that the foundation of repentance is the mercy of God, by which he restores the lost. In no other sense is it stated by Mark and Luke, that he *preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins*. Repentance is not placed first, as some ignorantly suppose, as if it were the ground of the forgiveness of sins, or as if it induced God to begin to be gracious to us.²

Jacob Arminius invented Arminianism, which is the same error and lie as that of Pelagius. This is proven by Canons 2, error and rejection 3. Our church fathers knew it was the same man-as-God lie out of hell. The doctrine of the Arminians is that Christ has obtained the *right* to eternal life. God's predestination is his choosing those who work faith and his rejecting those who work unbelief. One must work faith and repentance, then God will give the blessings of salvation. The Arminians' doctrine as expressed in error 3 must reject the truth in Canons 2.8.

1 The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, fourteenth session, chap. 1, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 2:144–45.

2 John Calvin, commentary on Matthew 3:2, in *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), <http://www.ccel.org>.

Homer C. Hoeksema wrote the following on that article:

The Arminian is forced to reject the line of the truth which maintains that Christ through His perfect satisfaction of his divine justice, and because His death was the perfect satisfaction of God's justice with respect to our sin, obtained, actually purchased, for all the elect all the blessings of salvation, including the faith whereby these blessings are actually applied to us. He must reject this line because it would mean that the elect inevitably come into possession of those blessings, and that, too, not through any merit or work of their own, but solely through the merit of Christ and the work of divine grace.³

Arminians believe that in order to come into the possession of their salvation or its blessings that a work of man—performed by grace, of course—must precede. This man-as-God lie was pushed out of the church, and the truth was exalted. Christ has perfectly accomplished, actually obtained, and inevitably gives to his people all their salvation. God determines from eternity who is saved, and he gives them faith and works in them repentance.

An important point of the Arminians' position is their fourth article regarding resistible grace. The article ends with "but as for the manner of co-operation, this grace is not irresistible, for many resist the Holy Ghost (Acts vii)."⁴ They make the Holy Spirit to be an offer, and man can reject the Spirit. But the Spirit does not depend on man; the Spirit works independently of man. God is the creator, independent from the works of the believer.

Recent Church History

Although God used the creeds to preserve the truth in some Reformed churches, common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel plague almost every nominally Reformed and Presbyterian church today. Abraham Kuyper, a Calvinist-turned-politician from the Netherlands, invented common grace. Prof. Ralph Jansen pushed common grace in the Christian Reformed Church until common grace was officially accepted in 1924. Common grace teaches that God gives a particular grace to his people, and he gives a common grace to every person, thus denying total depravity and irresistible

grace. The first point of common grace contains the well-meant offer:

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.⁵

The general offer, or the well-meant offer, is the belief that God genuinely desires the salvation of every person, that God desires to save those whom he hates from eternity, and that salvation is offered to every person who hears that offer. You can see how this is the same heresy as Arminianism. God is no longer sovereign. What he wills—the salvation of all men—does not happen. Salvation is based upon the action of man to accept or reject the offer of the gospel. Man as God.

This doctrine is closely connected to the conditional covenant. Prof. William Heyns taught that children of believers must repent and believe to be saved and that the general offer of a general promise is given to all who hear the preaching. This doctrine limits God's salvation to being conditioned on the believer's acceptance of Christ into their hearts.

Because of their stand against these false doctrines, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, Rev. George Ophoff, and Rev. Henry Danhof were put out of the Christian Reformed Church. They knew the conditional covenant that came from Heyns' doctrine and that common grace takes away from Christ's work. God preserved his church and strengthened the truth of the covenant of grace in the Protestant Reformed Churches. God's salvation is from eternity. God freely gives all the blessings of salvation to his people in the covenant. We receive those through Christ by faith, not by our acceptance of him.

3 Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 396.

4 Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 1:518.

5 *Acts of Synod 1924 of the Christian Reformed Church Held from 18 June to 8 July 1924 in Kalamazoo, MI USA*, trans. Henry J. De Mots, ed. John Knight (Grand Rapids, MI: Archives of the Christian Reformed Church, 2000), 145-146, https://www.calvin.edu/library/database/crcnasynd/1924acts_et.pdf.

Heyns died in the Christian Reformed Church, but his conditional covenant theology did not die. Klaas Schilder took up Heyns' doctrine in the Netherlands. Schilder became a friend of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and many Protestant Reformed people began to adopt what Schilder taught. The Declaration of Principles was formed by the Protestant Reformed synod to defend against the conditional covenant theology of the emigrants from the Netherlands. However, some Protestant Reformed ministers, such as Hubert De Wolf, took the conditional theology of Klaas Schilder and the liberated churches in the Netherlands and developed it in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The following quotes show the sly nature of the false doctrine that De Wolf taught:

I don't believe that it is ridiculous to say that if you believe, you will be saved. Then that salvation must mean salvation as conscious reality. And I believe that in that conscious sense, as we experience salvation, that that salvation is contingent on our believing and that that believing of ours is, of course, again, the fruit of the grace of God which he bestows sovereignly upon his people...

If it means, on the other hand, that in the initial sense, the Holy Spirit cannot assure us unless we first do something—if that's the meaning of this question—is the assurance of the Holy Spirit that we are—that our salvation is wholly in Christ—if that assurance depends on something in you and me, then it is not conditional. Couldn't be. That would simply be Pelagian... However, if you mean by assurance of the Holy Spirit the conscious personal assurance of our personal participation in that salvation, if that's what you mean—but that's really not what the Catechism is speaking of here. If that's what you mean, then my answer is yes. It's conditional. It is from the subjective point of view of our experience...

Now, I believe that those articles show, Mr. Chairman, that the assurance of the Holy Spirit, that is, the assurance which the Holy Spirit works concerning our personal participation in that salvation, is conditional, from the point of view of our experience, upon many things—upon sanctification, I would say, as long as we remember—as long as we remember, Mr. Chairman, that persevering is always the fruit of preservation. That's my answer...

Mr. Chairman, I have never contended that there are conditions unto salvation in that comprehensive sense of the word. I believe, however, that there are conditions to the enjoyment of our

salvation, and I think that that can be shown upon the basis of scripture. And I say once again, Mr. Chairman, conditions which we fulfill by the grace of God, not that we do anything of ourselves, not at all...

If you believe, you will be saved.⁶

This is Arminianism at its roots. Rev. H. Hoeksema and Rev. G. Ophoff used the following quotes from Thomas Ralston to describe the development of the Arminians' lie applied to their present controversy. Ralston described salvation by grace in the eyes of an Arminian and a Calvinist:

That salvation is of grace, in the sense in which the term may be explained, is perhaps more than Arminians can admit, either in words or in effect. For if by salvation by grace Calvinists understand that faith and obedience have no connection whatever with salvation, either as conditions or otherwise, this view of salvation by grace must be rejected by Arminians, as directly contrary to the Scriptures. And this, we are persuaded, is the sense in which salvation by grace is understood, when it is said that the Arminian system does, in effect, destroy it.

The plain difference between Calvinism and Arminianism, on this subject, is this: Calvinists cannot see how salvation can be of grace, if it have any respect to faith, or anything else as a condition; whereas Arminians, while they understand that repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, are indispensable conditions of salvation with all to whom the gospel is addressed, understand at the same time, that salvation is entirely from beginning to end, a work of God through grace.⁷

Faith and obedience have nothing whatsoever to do with attaining any part of our salvation. But the Arminian makes salvation dependent on faith and obedience. De Wolf made a condition. A condition is when *A* precedes *B*; and without *A* preceding *B*, *B* cannot come. De Wolf said that believing comes before the experience of salvation. Assurance, which the Spirit works, comes after sanctification and its effects. The Protestant Reformed Churches fought this conditional theology long ago. The Declaration of Principles denied faith or any other activity as a condition or prerequisite unto salvation. The Protestant Reformed Churches defended the unconditional promise, unconditional salvation, and the covenant of grace. This defense of the truth resulted in reducing the church to a third of its size.

6 The above quotations are from "De Wolf's Examination," in *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 17 (April 2022): 8–25.

7 As quoted in Herman Hoeksema, "Conditions in the Light of Scripture," *Standard Bearer* 29, no. 13 (April 1, 1953): 292.

The error of De Wolf never died in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The devil revived the same lie in the Protestant Reformed Churches in recent years and hid it behind other words. The same idea of a condition can be expressed with different words, as is evident from the following quotations:

There is an activity of the believer that is prior to the experience of a particular blessing from God.⁸

In fact, the more faithful the saints are to God's law in the grace of Jesus Christ, the more they prosper in the great blessings of the covenant. They prosper in their marriages, in their family life, and in their church life. Above all, they prosper in the enjoyment of God's covenant fellowship.⁹

First, a sinner believes by the grace of God, who gives him faith as a gift; then, he is saved or comes into the possession and enjoyment of his salvation.¹⁰

Justification is God's act of declaring believers righteous, while faith is our activity of trusting Jesus for salvation, which is *not* God's act.¹¹

He demands that we confess, and He forgives only after we confess our sins.¹²

When the child of God repents, God forgives his sin. Forgiveness follows repentance.¹³

What he is describing is a life lived in obedience to God's ten commandments. God uses that in order to confirm in us the assurance of our election and salvation.¹⁴

Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification.¹⁵

The doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches is man precedes God. There is something man must do before God gives certain blessings of salvation. Repentance must come before forgiveness. Sanctification and its effects (works) are used for assurance. They give glory to man. It is the same lie as De Wolf's. The same lie of Arminius. The same lie of Pelagius dragged out of hell. The lie of the serpent: man as God.

Yet God preserved his church. The wonderful truth that "unconditional salvation, unconditional promise, and unconditional covenant in every aspect is given to God's children through Christ, the living head of the covenant, who continually makes intercession for us, totally depraved sinners," lives on in the Reformed Protestant Churches. God is faithfully preserving us, resting us on Christ, and bestowing the blessings of salvation and the covenant to us who continually sin more and more.

The sword of Christ comes down with a mighty power, dividing the truth from the lie, cutting off cancerous heresy from the true church or removing his church from a corrupted body, and separating the world and the false church from his covenant children. Throughout all time God comes down and separates his people from the world, just as they have been separated in eternity by the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. God as God.

We as a church find comfort in the controversies of which we are a part.

It is a biblical principle that where the gospel is most faithfully and strictly proclaimed, the forces of evil and apostasy are strongest in their contradiction of it. Where the truth is the sharpest, the lie is the strongest; where the lie is the strongest, the truth must be the sharpest.¹⁶

The devil does not stir up controversies over the truth and the lie where the lie has already gotten a stranglehold. He fights viciously to attack the true church. We must not dull our blades but put our trust in Christ and his words:

19. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.
20. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.
21. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. (John 15:19–21)

—Caleb Ophoff

8 *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches 2020*, 75–78.

9 James Slopsema, "Treasure in the House of the Righteous," *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 2 (October 15, 2020): 28.

10 Martyn McGeown, "The *Ordo Salutis* (5) Saving Faith: Given to Believe," *Standard Bearer* 100, no. 11 (March 1, 2024): 279.

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

12 Russell Dykstra, "Reconciliation Earnestly Desired," sermon on Lord's Day 51 preached on July 11, 2021, in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/711211549243881>.

13 Ronald Cammenga, "Antinomian? Without a Doubt (1)," *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 18 (July 2022): 418.

14 Ronald Cammenga, "Saving Faith as Assurance," sermon on Lord's Day 7 preached on March 14, 2021, in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/31421175035658>.

15 Kenneth Koole, "Herman Witsius: Still Relevant (4)," *Standard Bearer* 97, no. 7 (January 1, 2021): 151.

16 Herman Hanko and Mark Hoeksema, *Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016), 182.



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you.—2 Corinthians 13:11

*Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day:
we are not of the night, nor of darkness.—1 Thessalonians 5:5*

Children of the light! Children of the day!
Glorious titles for all the children of God.
God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.
The Word who became flesh is the light of the world.

That light shined in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. In Adam all men became darkness, which is the description of man's total depravity by nature. That darkness describes the depravity of man as the condition in which he is the antithesis of God. Man is conceived and born dead in trespasses and sins. In that condition he stands in enmity against the living God. Man says no to God's yes and yes to God's no. Man is ignorant of God and of the purposes of God. The spiritual things of God are foolishness to man, and he cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned. Man also exists in an alliance with all the spiritual forces of darkness and together with them opposes God and all that is of God. Over that alliance of the powers of darkness, the wrath of God operates, so that he brings all who are of the night and of the darkness into the outer darkness of hell.

We are not of the night nor of the darkness!

Wonder of grace! We are children of the light and children of the day. The Father of lights, in whom there is no shadow of turning, has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. He has taken all whom he appointed to salvation to be of his party in the world. He has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, in which he brought to light life and immortality. And in his light we see light!

Now the night is far spent, and the day is at hand. It is the time when the coming of the eternal day of the new heavens and the new earth is about to break in upon the world with all its fullness, glory, and perfection. That day broke into the darkness of the world with the promise of the coming of Christ in the garden of Eden. The coming of that day the saints of the old dispensation saw with increasing clarity. The light of that day pierced the darkness of the world with the coming of the Dayspring from on high, who was born in Bethlehem. That light appeared to be extinguished in the darkness of Golgotha and yet reappeared with greater intensity in the resurrection of Christ. Now the Dayspring's light shines with growing intensity in the darkness of this sin-cursed world until at last that light will bathe the world in its brilliant brightness when the Lord appears on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Yes, you all are children of the light and of the day. God has caused the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ to shine in your hearts. He has not appointed you to wrath but to obtain salvation in Jesus Christ, our Lord. In the day of the Lord, he will give to you your place in that eternal city, where the doors are never shut and the Son of God is the light of it and there is no night!

Let us then not sleep, as do others! But let us watch and be sober, for the day is at hand.

—NJL